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Unveiling Gendered Hurdles: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Leadership Barriers in Austria and Greece within the Framework of EU Policies.

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Graz, 24.06.2024   Signature

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List of Supporting Technology

- Grammarly is used throughout the thesis to check grammar.

- DeepL is used to translate the Greek interview transcripts for the analysis and look up individual words.

- MS Teams is used to conduct, record, and transcribe the interviews.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the barriers to women's leadership in Austria and Greece within the framework of EU gender equality policies. It provides a comparative analysis of organizational policies, awareness levels, societal obstacles, and the prevalent glass ceiling phenomenon. Despite different cultural contexts and economic conditions, both countries show a strong commitment to gender equality but face unique challenges. By exploring the experiences of women leaders, this research emphasizes the potential of collaborative and comprehensive approaches. The findings advocate for policy reforms, cultural shifts, and innovative organizational practices to create inclusive and equitable workplaces. This study aims to inspire a future where gender equality in leadership is a tangible reality, benefiting both the workforce and society.

Keywords: Female Leadership, Gender Equality, Austria, Greece, EU Policies, Glass Ceiling.

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1   Introduction

Although women make up half of the world's population and over 46 percent of the global labor force, gender inequality is still prevailing. (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2024)

From its genesis, gender equality is a fundamental human right. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, (1948), stated that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", and Article 2 stated that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, birth or other status." (TCSJI, 2023).

Seventy-six years later, across the globe, many women and girls still face discrimination based on sex and gender (ODVV, 2022). They have demanded that their rights be respected by changing laws and taking to the streets. In the digital age, new movements such as the #MeToo campaign have flourished, highlighting the prevalence of gender-based violence and sexual harassment (Forbes, 2023).

The subject of women's leadership has gained significant attention, especially as women have progressively taken on influential roles within the corporate sphere (Eagly, 2018). However, it is imperative to recognize that women encounter significant challenges pursuing such leadership positions (Forbes Coaches Council, 2018).

In 2020, data collected from 95 countries revealed that more than half did not have quotas for women in national parliaments. Nearly half of these countries also restricted women's employment in specific jobs or industries (Azcona et al., 2021, p. 10). The European Union, however, stands out globally in gender equality, counting 14 of the top 20 countries worldwide in gender equality are EU Member States (Grubanov-Boskovic et al., 2020, p. 12). This achievement is attributed to robust equal treatment legislation, efforts to integrate the gender perspective across various policy domains, and laws addressing specific

inequalities. However, no Member State has achieved full gender equality, and progress is slow (Grubanov-Boskovic et al., 2020, p. 12). Member States, on average, scored 67.4 out of 100 in the EU Gender Equality Index 2019, which has improved by just 5.4 points since 2005 (European Commission, 2020, p. 2).

The Gender Equality Strategy frames the European Commission's work on gender equality and sets out the policy objectives and key actions for the 2020-2025 period (European Commission, 2020) . Its overarching goal is to realize a gender-equal Europe in which gender-based violence, sex discrimination, and structural inequalities between women and men become outdated (European Commission, 2020).

1.1   Problem Formulation and Research Gap

Over the past few decades, notable advancements have been made in fostering diversity and promoting gender equality within the European Union. Specifically, a comparative analysis of the average EU Gender Equality Index between 2013 and 2022 reveals a noticeable increase from 63.1 to 68.6. This upward trajectory signifies that considerable transformations have occurred over time, indicating shifts in societal norms, policies, and practices about gender equality. These findings underscore the evolving landscape of gender dynamics and suggest that progress has been achieved in pursuing greater gender parity within the EU (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013-2022).

The EU recognizes the imperative for further enhancements to ensure equal opportunities for everyone to prosper in society and the economy. Currently, only 7.5% of board chairs and 7.7% of CEOs are women, while 22% of AI programmers are female (European Commission, 2020). These statistics underscore the pressing need to redress the gender imbalance in decision-making roles, including within company boards and political spheres. Concrete actions from the EU are necessary, such as the adoption of EU-wide targets for gender balance on corporate boards and the encouragement of women's participation as voters and candidates in the 2024 European Parliament elections.

Additionally, fostering a more equitable representation of women and men across all employment sectors to promote workplace diversity can be achieved by advocating for the implementation of the EU Platform of Diversity Charters across various industries.

Even though there are common initiatives within European countries, and countries follow the same policies (European Commission, 2020), notable distinctions exist arising from their cultural backgrounds, economic prosperity, historical context, societal structures, and other influencing factors. These disparities hinder the application and outcome of these initiatives uniformly across all countries (European Commission, 2023). The profound influence of culture, traditions, and social beliefs within certain nations significantly impacts the effectiveness of the initiatives above.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index, which assesses the degree to which women and men have access to equal employment opportunities and favorable working conditions, Greece scored 53.4 in 2022, with the data for the 2022 Index being primarily from 2020. Despite its progress, Greece remains last in the EU in terms of gender equality. Conversely, Austria has achieved a score of 68.8 in the employment domain, exceedingly slightly the EU average (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

Contrary to expectations, Eurostat's data for 2022 reveals that Austria fares worse than Greece regarding the unadjusted gender pay gap. This measure reflects the disparity between male and female employees' average gross hourly earnings as a percentage of male gross earnings. Specifically, Austria reports a pay gap of 18.4%, higher than the EU average of 12.7%. In contrast, Greece demonstrates a relatively lower pay gap of 10.4%, which contrasts with its standing in the Gender Equality Index (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2021).

For this research, Austria and Greece have been chosen as focal points due to their significant disparities in gender equality indices despite being EU member states governed by similar policies and regulations concerning women's

empowerment. After a thorough investigation, the author found no existing studies comparing and contrasting the specific barriers hindering women from advancing up the hierarchical ladder in these two countries. Greece, located in the southeastern part of Europe, and Austria, located at the heart of Europe, exhibit distinct beliefs, traditions, and perspectives compared to each other. These discrepancies between the two countries present an intriguing opportunity to delve deeper into the underlying factors influencing gender equality outcomes within the EU and point out specific factors in each country that hinder access to leadership positions for female leaders.

Existing studies shed light on the persistent disparities in leadership and management positions despite advancements in women's participation in medicine (Kuhlmann et al., 2017) (Matot et al., 2020). Notably, while the representation of female medical students and doctors approaches gender balance thresholds, the same cannot be said for leadership roles, particularly among senior doctors and full professors. This study concentrates specifically on the field of medicine, recognizing it as a domain where gender disparities are particularly pronounced due to its historically male-dominated nature and lack of comparison between specific countries.

Another study delves into the realm of educational leadership, focusing specifically on the influence of gender within two distinct cultural contexts, the UK and Greece (Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009). Focusing on these countries, the research seeks to uncover the extent to which gender impacts leadership roles in education, with a particular emphasis on female participation across different educational levels.

Others conducted a comparative analysis of women's leadership in strategic positions, focusing on the representation of women in politics in Indonesia and Greece (Kyveloukokkaliari & Nurhaeni, 2017). Despite regulations promoting women's political participation, their representation in elected office remains lower than expected.

The existing literature needs comprehensive comparative studies between Austria and Greece that specifically investigate the factors hindering women's advancement into leadership roles. While numerous studies have examined gender disparities in leadership across various countries, a distinct absence of research directly compares Austria and Greece in this context. Austria and Greece represent two different cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts within Europe, each with unique challenges and opportunities for women in leadership. Researchers could delve deeper into understanding the factors hindering women's leadership by conducting a comparative analysis between these countries.

In addition to the objective differences in gender equality metrics between Austria and Greece, personal connections also influenced the choice of these countries for comparison. Greece holds a special significance as it is not only the country where the author was born, raised, and worked for several years but also where they gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for gender equality in a cultural and professional context. Conversely, Austria, where the author is currently pursuing their studies and has gained experience in the business sector, offers a contrasting perspective shaped by its distinct cultural norms and organizational dynamics. The comparison of these personal experiences in both countries highlights the evident cultural differences and disparities in the ease of accessing leadership positions for females. This personal connection adds depth to the research endeavor, enriching the exploration of the underlying factors influencing gender equality outcomes within the EU context.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis explores women's empowerment policies and practices within the European Union framework, focusing on Greece and Austria. The research questions delve into EU policies, their implementation in corporate settings, barriers to effectiveness, differences between Greece and Austria in policy application, and women's experiences regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon.

These inquiries aim to deepen our understanding of gender dynamics and empowerment strategies in the EU context, offering policy formulation and implementation insights.

Q1) What EU policies and initiatives address gender equality in employment and leadership representation, and how are these policies implemented in corporate environments in Greece and Austria?

This question investigates the EU's policies and initiatives promoting gender equality across employment and leadership. It seeks to understand how these policies are translated into practice within corporate settings in Greece and Austria, providing insights into implementation effectiveness and potential improvement areas.

Q2) What are the barriers hindering the effective implementation of women empowerment policies in Greece and Austria?

This question identifies the challenges that impede the successful implementation of women empowerment policies in Greece and Austria. By examining the differences in how these countries interpret and apply EU policies, the research aims to uncover unique contextual factors and institutional barriers that contribute to varying outcomes in gender equality initiatives.

Q3) How do women in Austria and Greece perceive and navigate the glass ceiling phenomenon?

This question delves into the experiences and perspectives of women working in Austria and Greece, particularly regarding the challenges posed by the glass ceiling phenomenon. By exploring women's perceptions and strategies for advancement, the research seeks to uncover insights that can inform efforts to promote women's leadership representation.

1.3 Objective of the Research

This study aims to address the void in the literature and explore the distinct factors that hinder women's progress in leadership positions in these two countries despite the implementation of similar EU policies. By focusing on these

specific countries, the study centers on the selected countries of Austria and Greece to highlight the divergent implementation of EU policies due to various factors. It aims to illuminate the distinct barriers present in each country and offer valuable insights into practical strategies for advancing gender equality within these industries.

The findings from this study have the potential to inform policymakers, organizations, and advocates with valuable guidance for fostering gender equality. By offering evidence-based recommendations and context-specific strategies customized for Austria and Greece, the study aims to advance gender inclusivity. Targeted interventions can be devised and implemented by identifying and mitigating the barriers identified in this research, fostering more equitable and inclusive environments conducive to professional growth and progression in both countries. Moreover, this study encourages both nations to critically evaluate their findings and adopt policies to support and empower the female population.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology for this master thesis will pivot to focus solely on interviews with leaders and HR experts to compare the barriers to women's leadership in Austria and Greece, utilizing the same EU policies as a comparative baseline.

The research will adopt a qualitative approach, explicitly utilizing semi-structured interviews. This shift aims to gain in-depth insights into the perspectives of leaders and HR experts regarding women's leadership barriers in Austria and Greece. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility while providing a framework for exploration, enabling a nuanced understanding of the topic's complexities (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

To ensure a comprehensive range of viewpoints, interviews will be conducted with both female and male leaders and HR experts in both countries.

This approach will facilitate capturing diverse perspectives and experiences related to women's leadership.

Communication with potential participants will be established through private channels within personal and professional networks, ensuring direct engagement with individuals possessing relevant expertise. Additionally, the interviews will be conducted remotely, leveraging online platforms to overcome geographical constraints and facilitate seamless interaction.

Mayring's qualitative content analysis approach will be employed for the qualitative analysis. This method involves systematic coding and categorization to identify repeating themes and patterns within the interview data (Mayring, 2014). By adhering to Mayring's approach, the analysis aims to maintain rigor and systematically uncover insights into the barriers to women's leadership in Austria and Greece, thus enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

2   Literature Overview

2.1   Evolution of Leadership Theories

To gain insight into the barriers women encounter as they strive to advance within the hierarchical structures of the business world, it is crucial to delve into the evolution of leadership theories. Understanding the development of these theories provides a framework for identifying how certain stereotypes and barriers may disproportionately affect female leaders. By examining the progression of leadership theories, we can elucidate the context in which these barriers arise and persist. This approach not only enhances the comprehension of the difficulties females face in leading roles but also underscores the significance of investigating these issues within specific socio-cultural contexts.

2.1.1   Trait Era: Great Man Theory and Trait Theories

In the 19th century, scholarly inquiry into leadership predominantly revolved around the inherent attributes of leaders and the quest to identify the personality traits and qualities associated with effective leadership. This era gave rise to the Great Man theory, which posited that leaders are born rather than made or trained (Bass B. M., 1981, p. 27) (Northouse, 2016, p. 19). According to this theory, only a select few individuals possess innate characteristics predisposing them to be effective leaders, achieving greatness as if by divine providence. Historical luminaries such as Julius Caesar, Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, and Napoleon Bonaparte often served as examples, perceived as natural-born leaders whose intrinsic qualities shaped the course of history (Bass B. M., 1981, p. 26).

Over time, the Great Man theory transitioned into Trait Theories, suggesting that leadership qualities can be inherited or cultivated. These theories propose that successful leaders may possess traits that are either inherent or can be developed through education and practice (Northouse, 2016). Researchers aimed to identify the optimal combination of traits contributing to effective

leadership, scrutinizing mental, social, and physical attributes. However, despite efforts, a consistent set of universally applicable traits proved elusive.

2.1.2 Behavioural Era: Behavioural Theory

The behavioral theory of leadership focuses on the actions and behaviors of leaders rather than their innate traits or skills. It diverges from the trait and skills approaches by highlighting the observable behaviors of leaders in different situations (Northouse, 2016, p. 71). The focus of behavioral theory is on how leaders behave toward their subordinates in various contexts (Northouse, 2016).

Studies conducted at Ohio and Michigan universities laid the foundation for the Blake and Mouton managerial grid, a renowned model of leadership behavior also referred to as the leadership grid (Northouse, 2016, pp. 72-78). This model classifies leadership styles based on two dimensions: concern for people (y-axes) and concern for tasks or results (x-axes). Leaders are categorized into five distinct styles:

1. Authority Compliance (9, 1): Leaders with this style prioritize productivity over interpersonal relationships, displaying a high concern for tasks and a low concern for people. The focus is primarily on achieving objectives, often at the expense of fostering positive working relationships.

2. Country Club Management (1, 9): This leadership style emphasizes building strong interpersonal relationships while placing less emphasis on achieving tasks. Leaders exhibit a high concern for people but a low concern for productivity, creating a comfortable work environment where task completion may take a backseat.

3. Impoverished Management (1, 1): Leaders in this category demonstrate minimal concern for both tasks and people. They maintain a hands-off approach, exerting little effort in either building relationships or accomplishing tasks. Consequently, productivity and interpersonal dynamics suffer under this leadership style.

4. Middle of the Road Management (5, 5): Leaders adopting this style strike a balance between concern for tasks and concern for people. They make moderate efforts to achieve goals while maintaining positive relationships within the team. However, the outcomes achieved may fall short of optimal performance, representing a compromise between task focus and people focus.

5. Team Management (9, 9): This leadership style prioritizes productivity and interpersonal relationships. Leaders exhibit high concern for tasks and people, fostering a supportive work environment where achieving organizational goals is paramount while maintaining strong team dynamics. This approach embodies a holistic approach to leadership, striving for excellence in both task accomplishment and relationship-building (Northouse, 2016, pp. 74-78).

2.1.3 Situational Era: Contingent and Situational Theories

Due to identified limitations in previous research on leader behaviors and effectiveness, scholars shifted towards a contingency theory to address these shortcomings (Cogliser & Brigham, 2004). The contingency theory asserts that there isn't an optimal leadership style, and effective leaders adapt their approach based on situational contingencies. Fiedler's research from the late 1960s is crucial for this theory, suggesting that a leader's effectiveness is determined by how well their personality matches the situation they are dealing with. (Harrison, 2018, pp. 27-28). Fiedler introduced the least preferred coworker (LPC) scale to measure leader personality as relationship-motivated or task-motivated, with situational favourableness determined by leader-member relations, task structure, and position power (Fiedler, 1978). While the contingency theory underscores the importance of considering the situation in leadership assessment, it has faced challenges in explaining why certain leadership styles are more effective in particular contexts (Northouse, 2016, p. 100). Despite these limitations, the theory has emphasized leaders' need to adapt their behavior to varying situations in an ever-changing world.

2.1.4 New Leadership Era: Transactional & Transformational Theories

In 1978, James McGregor Burns—a political scientist—wrote a book on leadership. Transformational leadership includes reform, revolutionary, heroic, ideological, and intellectual leadership, while transactional leadership subsumes legislative, executive, party, group, and opinion leadership (Burns, 1978). He also identified the basic quality of transactional leadership, stating how it is founded on a give-and-take approach. In principle, both parties engage in a mutually respectful exchange of valuable resources, such as labor for compensation. The organization gains from the employee's work and, to some degree, their loyalty. In return, the employee receives benefits like payment and access to the organization's resources. Burns (1978) viewed this type of exchange as a fundamental element of leadership, though he argued it was more limited than transformational leadership. Transactional leaders foster relationships with their followers based on fundamental values like honesty, responsibility, fairness, and honoring commitments. (Burns, 1978).

On the other side, transformative leadership holds greater effectiveness compared to transactional leadership. A transformative leader not only identifies and addresses the existing needs of potential followers but also delves deeper into understanding and satisfying higher aspirations, engaging followers on a holistic level. This results in a mutual relationship of inspiration and growth, where followers are empowered to become leaders themselves, and leaders may evolve into moral agents (Burns, 2003). At the core of transformative leadership lies a moral dimension derived from a visionary perspective. This leadership addresses followers' authentic and elevated needs, aspirations, and values, bringing to light their underlying desires and attitudes (Burns, 2003). The leader's vision serves to awaken what lies dormant within followers, aiming to unite them in pursuing higher objectives (Burns, 1978).

In 1981, researcher Bernard Bass expanded the theory by elucidating the psychological aspects of leader/follower instincts. According to Bass (1985, p.

595) transformational leaders make people aware of the outcome of the task and raise others' consciousness of what they can achieve when they make some personal sacrifices. In other words, transformational leaders influence others to transcend their self-interests for the benefit of the group. Consequently, people sacrifice themselves or their self-interests for the good of groups and organizations. Transformational leaders make people seek high-order needs such as self-actualization. Transformational leaders are more likely to do the right things rather than do things right (Macit, 2003, p. 100).

2.1.5 Servant Leadership

According to Robert K. Greenleaf, who popularized the term in a 1970s essay titled "The Servant as Leader", Servant Leadership is a philosophy and style of leadership that places the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees at the forefront. It is a comprehensive style of leadership that involves followers on various levels (such as relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual), enabling them to develop and reach their full potential (Nathan et al., 2019, p. 114). This approach stands in contrast to traditional leadership models that often prioritize organizational success above all else. Instead of focusing solely on achieving objectives, servant leaders prioritize the needs of their team members, believing that by serving them, the organization will ultimately prosper (Greenleaf, 2015). Servant leadership embodies a set of core characteristics that prioritize the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees. Rooted in integrity and ethical principles, servant leaders exhibit humility and a commitment to serving a higher purpose within the organization (Greenleaf, 2015).

Several articles have aimed to differentiate servant leadership from transformational leadership conceptually (Jr. & Wheeler, 2006), building on earlier work by Graham (1991) (Eva et al., 2019). Notably, the review by Van Dierendonck (2011) showed promise in distinguishing servant leadership from other leadership styles, analyzing its distinctions from seven other approaches.

Compared to Transformational Leadership, Van Dierendonck argued that Servant Leadership prioritizes the psychological needs of followers as a primary goal, while Transformational Leadership places these needs secondary to organizational objectives. While both Servant and Transformational Leadership address followers' needs, there is a qualitative difference in their motives and priorities within the organization. Transformational leaders focus on followers' needs to enhance organizational goals, viewing it as a means to an end, whereas servant leaders prioritize the multidimensional development of followers as an end in itself. Stone et al. (2004) implied that organizational goals are achieved as a by-product of sustained focus on followers' needs over time.

2.1.6 Leadership Today

The current trend in leadership is characterized by a shift towards a more holistic and adaptable approach, as outlined in McKinsey's article on "New Leadership for a New Era of Thriving Organizations". Leaders are increasingly expected to navigate complex and uncertain environments, requiring a blend of traditional leadership competencies emphasizing agility, resilience, and empathy (McKinsey & Company, 2023). In response to rapid technological advancements, changing workforce demographics, and evolving stakeholder expectations, successful leaders are embracing a more inclusive and collaborative style, fostering diverse and inclusive cultures within their organizations (Moioli, 2023). Additionally, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of ethical leadership, sustainability, and purpose-driven strategies as organizations seek to create long-term value for all stakeholders while addressing societal and environmental challenges (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Overall, the current trend in leadership underscores the need for leaders to embrace agility, inclusivity, and purpose, driving organizational resilience and success in today's dynamic business landscape (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

The impact of past leadership theories on women in leadership positions is complex and multifaceted (Chin, 2011). As the author mentioned above, many

leadership theories were developed based on observations of predominantly male leaders, often in hierarchical and masculine organizational structures. Consequently, nowadays, where more and more females are participating in leading positions, these theories may not fully account for the unique challenges and experiences women face in leadership roles.

2.2 Development of the Conception of the Changing Role of Females

The struggle for women's rights is far from new, stretching back through the annals of history. Centuries ago, Queen Nzinga Mbandi of the Mbundu fiercely resisted Portuguese colonial dominance in what is now Angola. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft penned "A Vindication of the Rights of Women," a seminal work often regarded as the cornerstone of Western feminism. Six decades later, Sojourner Truth eloquently advocated for women's rights alongside her abolitionist efforts, leaving an indelible mark on the quest for equality (Guterres, 2020).

The development of the conception of the changing role of females has been profoundly influenced by the works of Friedrich Engels, particularly his seminal work "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (1884). Engels provides profound insights into the evolving role of women in society, emphasizing the need for complete legal parity between spouses to achieve true equality (Engels, 1975). Engels envisions a future where private housekeeping becomes a social industry, freeing women from economic dependence on men (Engels, 1975). Engels' ideas continue to shape discussions on gender, economics, and social organization, inspiring ongoing debates about the nature of women's oppression and the path to genuine liberation (Engels, 1975).

Feminist researchers, building upon Marxist insights, have proposed alternative theories, such as Christine Delphy's concept and the exploitation of women (Delphy, 2016). Delphy introduces the concept of the 'family production,' which suggests that women's exploitation stems not from the specific tasks they perform within the household but from the fact that their labour is confined to

the home (Delphy, 2016). According to Delphy, women effectively become unpaid workers for their husbands, as men dominate activities outside the home while women are limited to domestic tasks. Women's access to the labor market is thus contingent upon men's decisions, particularly when men cannot fully support the family financially or achieve their own goals by exploiting women's domestic labor. In this framework, the family serves as the primary source of women's exploitation, leading to the characterization of all women as a uniformly exploited and oppressed class within the family method of production, where men hold dominant positions (Delphy, 2016).

2.3 The Changing Context of Female Leadership

The 21st century is an era propagating equal rights for all, supported by an expanding body of anti-discrimination measures. Indeed, the results of the historic women's liberation and feminist movements are impressive but still not enough, as former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stated (Clinton, 2017). Over the last decades, the educational level of women has increased tremendously, so now more than 50% of graduates across the European Union are women (Sedlmayr, 2017, p. 8) (Eurostat , 2023).

The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were crucial for the entry of women into the field of education and work in Greece. In 1890, Ioanna Stephanopoli was the first woman that get accepted to study Philosophy at the University of Athens (Atsave, n.d.). However, the Rector of the University was displeased and complained in a letter to the Minister of Education "...about the mixing of the sexes..." (Atsave, 2022). Two years later, in 1892, Foudoukli was also accepted into the Department of Mathematics of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Athens and was the first Greek woman to study mathematics in modern Greece (Kastanis, 2010). In 1895 the first Inspectors of Elementary Schools were appointed and in 1908 women were hired for the first time in the Public Service (Telegraph Offices and Telephones) (Atsave, n.d.). Tertiary education in Greece has grown considerably over the past few decades, and in

2020, 51% of women aged 25-34 had a tertiary qualification, compared to 37% of men, while the OECD average was 52% for women and 39% for men (OECD, 2021).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Austria saw pivotal advancements in women's inclusion in higher education and employment. In 1897/98, the University of Vienna's Philosophical Faculty admitted its first female students after over 500 years since its inception. Initially small in number, with a ratio of 1:183, women gradually gained access to various faculties, including Medicine, in 1900. During the 1960s and 1970s, female enrolment in universities significantly increased, eventually leading to women surpassing men in university enrolment by 2000. (Ingrisch, 2021). Figure 1 below illustrates the educational level of women, surpassing that of men in almost all categories for 2019. When it comes to the selection of academic and vocational fields, there are still discrepancies. In the 2019/20 academic year, women represented a substantial majority in veterinary medicine (81.3%), humanities (76%), and fine and applied arts (70.7%). Conversely, there are fewer women in technical disciplines (Federal Chancellery Republic of Austria, 2022).
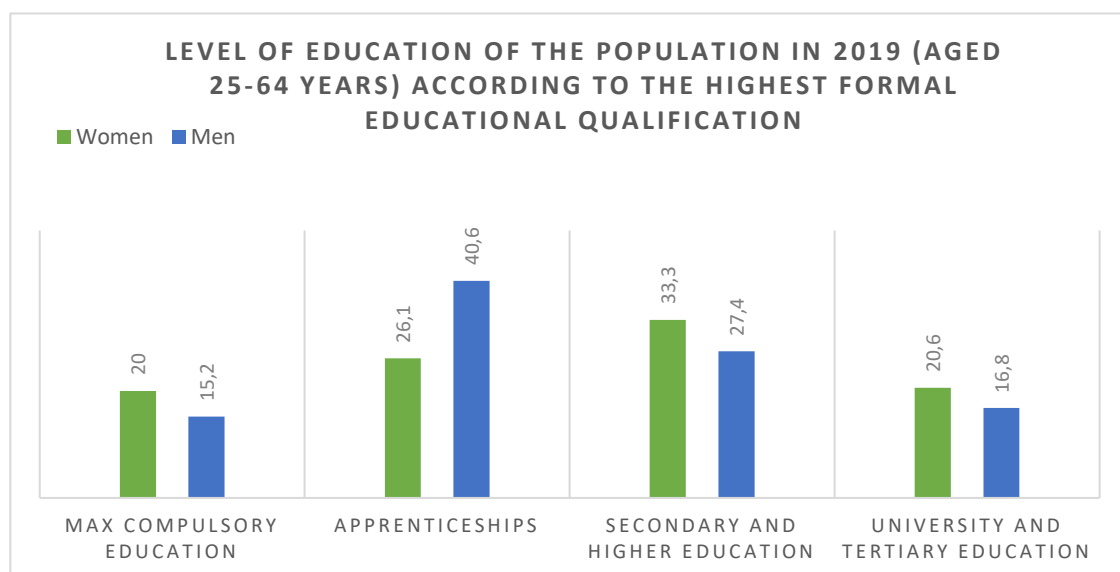

LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF THE POPULATION IN 2019 (AGED 25-64 YEARS) ACCORDING TO THE HIGHEST FORMAL EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

■ Women ■ Men

Category	Women	Men
MAX COMPULSORY EDUCATION	20	15,2
APPRENTICESHIPS	26,1	40,6
SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION	33,3	27,4
UNIVERSITY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION	20,6	16,8

Figure 1 Level of education in 2019 in Austria by gender (own illustration, based on Statistics Austria, 2022)

The 20th century witnessed a significant shift with the inclusion of women in domains traditionally dominated by men, marking a transformative milestone in gender dynamics (Stotsky, 2013). Despite strides towards gender equality, disparities persist, notably in professional settings and governmental arenas. These discrepancies are evident worldwide, with developing economies facing more pronounced challenges (Stotsky, 2013). Progress has been notable in areas such as education and healthcare, yet women continue to encounter barriers to achieving economic and political empowerment (Ely et al., 2011).

The disparity in gender representation within leadership roles across various domains constitutes a sobering reflection of persisting gender inequities, exemplified by a glaring absence of women in positions of prominence and influence (Eagly & Carli, 2008). The scarcity of women's leadership is severely evident in renowned spheres such as the film industry, where Kathryn Bigelow stands as the sole woman to have garnered an Academy Award for Best Director among a sea of male recipients (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2020, p. 13). This paucity extends far beyond cinema, echoing throughout global governance and political leadership corridors. Despite progress toward gender parity, the resounding absence of women at the helm of institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the presidencies of numerous nations underscores entrenched barriers to women's ascension to leadership positions (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2020, p. 13). The lack of women in leadership is not merely a statistical anomaly but a systemic issue sustained by deeply ingrained biases and structural barriers that impede women's advancement.

In contrast to the previous points, the next figure illustrates that in the EU, the percentage of women with tertiary education attainment in 2022 is higher than that of men, with women at 48% and men at 37%. Despite this higher level of educational attainment, women still face significant challenges in reaching leadership positions. This disparity highlights that education alone is not sufficient to ensure equal representation in leadership roles. Structural barriers,

gender biases, and organizational cultures may still impede women's progress to top positions, indicating a need for targeted efforts to address these issues beyond just increasing educational attainment.
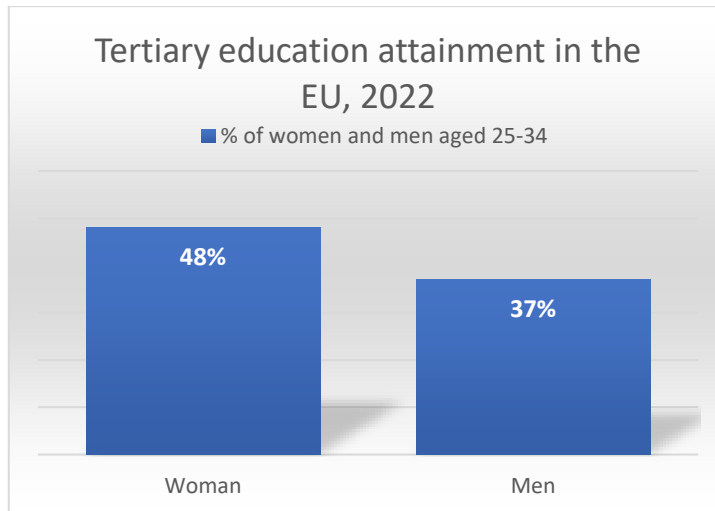

Figure 2 Tertiary education attainment in the EU for 2022(own illustration, based on Eurostat 2022)

2.4   Major Constraints for Female Career Progression

2.4.1   Gender Stereotypes

A gender stereotype is a broad term that describes a general perception or assumption about the qualities or traits associated with, or the roles assigned to, men and women (OHCHR Commissioned Report, 2013, p. 8). Gender stereotypes are social and cultural constructions of men and women due to their different physical, biological, cognitive, sexual, and social functions. Stereotypes can influence people's perceptions of others in a variety of ways. For example, if the attributes associated with a certain social category are undesirable, individuals in this group may be consistently discriminated against (Glick et al., 1988). A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits individuals' capacity to develop their abilities, pursue their professional careers, and make choices about their lives and life plans (Zampas, 2018, p. 2). Negative stereotypes, such as the belief that women are irrational, can be damaging, but even seemingly harmless

stereotypes, like the idea that women are naturally nurturing, can also have harmful effects (United Nations, 2023).

Gender stereotypes suggest that women are perceived as less agentic compared to men (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 590). This stereotype is particularly strong in Western societies that prioritize individualistic traits like autonomy (Cuddy et al., 2015), and it tends to persist over time (Haines et al., 2016). Despite some evidence suggesting a shift towards viewing women as more agentic (Wilde & Diekman, 2005) , they are generally still seen as less agentic than men (Steinmetz et al., 2014).

The stereotype of agency, particularly in the workplace, is perceived as harmful to women (Heilman M. E., 2012, p. 116). Given that traditional workplace roles are often associated with masculinity and agency, women are frequently deemed less suitable for these positions. Moreover, women who demonstrate competence may face social backlash for defying this stereotype (Heilman M. E., 2001). These dynamics are especially relevant in leadership roles (Eagly & Heilman, 2016), where qualities like assertiveness, self-confidence, aggression, and ambition—often considered agentic—are seen as essential for success (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). Consequently, due to being perceived as less agentic than men, women are viewed as less compatible with leadership roles, thus reducing their likelihood of ascending to leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574).

Past leadership theories, which predominantly emphasized male leaders and traits traditionally associated with masculinity, like the Great Man Theory and Trait Theory, have significantly shaped gender stereotypes in leadership. These theories, developed in male-dominated contexts, promoted the idea that effective leadership traits, such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and competitiveness, were inherently masculine. As a result, these theories reinforced societal expectations that associated leadership with men while portraying women as less suited for leadership roles. This connection between leadership theories and gender stereotypes has perpetuated the belief that

certain characteristics are inherently male or female, thereby influencing how leadership capabilities are perceived and evaluated across genders.

2.4.2 Evolutionary Psychology Analysis

Alice Hendrickson Eagly and Linda Lorene Carli critically analyze and challenge the evolutionary psychology analysis of leaders, particularly the notion that males are inherently predisposed to leadership roles while females are not (Eagly & Carli, 2008). According to evolutionary psychologists, men and women possess distinct personality traits because they developed different behavioral strategies for reproduction in ancient environments (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The core argument revolves around the observation that males and females invest varying amounts of time and energy in offspring care. In species like humans and other mammals, females' gestation and nursing demand significant investment, limiting the number of offspring they can support. Conversely, males' sperm contribution requires minimal effort, allowing them the potential to father numerous offspring without the need for subsequent care. To this argument, females' high investment caused them to become choosy about potential mates. This choosiness, in turn, forced males to compete with one another for sexual access to females, especially to fertile females. The men who prevailed in this competition were then more likely to have their genes carried on to the next generation (Eagly & Carli, 2008, p. 30).

Evolutionary psychology suggests that men are inherently predisposed to leadership roles due to ancestral behaviors. In ancient times, men engaged in competitive behaviors to secure access to fertile women, where aggression and risk-taking tendencies were advantageous for reproductive success (Archer, 2009). Consequently, these traits were likely passed down through generations. Conversely, ancestral women were inclined to seek mates who could provide resources for their survival and that of their offspring, as it increased their chances of reproduction and overall survival (Archer, 2009).

2.4.3 Social Role Theory

Other scholars mention that one basis for understanding and observing gender stereotyping lies in social role theory (Biddle, 1979). This theory posits that individuals are expected to adhere to behaviors and inclinations that align with their assigned social roles, which may be determined by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, or other demographic characteristics (Biddle, 1979).

Managerial positions are commonly associated with expectations of possessing strong technical and interpersonal skills, often perceived through a lens of masculinity (Post et al., 2009). Studies indicate that women are less likely to be perceived as possessing these traits traditionally associated with masculinity, reinforcing the existence of gender stereotypes in managerial roles (Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

However, the most significant conclusion of social role theory is that those who defy gender conventions are frequently viewed negatively. In other words, gender stereotypes are viewed as prescribing behavior for men and women rather than being purely descriptive. Women who have agentic tendencies, for instance, are frequently thought of as being less desirable. Like males, women who possess the agentic quality of competence are more likely to be viewed as cool. These prejudices towards women that go against social norms are displayed by both men and women.

As individuals internalize these cultural interpretations, gender becomes ingrained in their identities. Through these gender identities, individuals perceive themselves with the culturally defined feminine and masculine attributes associated with men and women, and their thoughts and actions may be influenced by these gendered aspects of their identities (Wood & Eagly, 2015) . The belief that women and men possess distinct abilities contributes to their tendency toward different career paths. Women are more prevalent in caregiving and early childhood education roles, whereas men tend to dominate in politics

and fields associated with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (European Work and Employment Research Centre , 2002) .

2.4.4 Glass Ceiling

The term glass ceiling was first introduced in 1978 during a panel discussion about women's aspirations. Marilyn Loden noted how the (female) panelists focused on the deficiencies in women's socialization, the self-deprecating ways women behaved, and the poor self-image many women allegedly carried. "Sitting quietly and listening to the criticisms was a struggle," she said, and at that point, she mentioned the sometimes-invisible barrier to success that many women come up against in their careers (BBC, 2017). On 24 May 2018, the "glass ceiling" became 40 years old and is more related than ever.

The Department of Labour describes the glass ceiling as those artificial barriers based on attitude or institutional bias that restrict qualified individuals from progressing to management positions in their organizations (Department of Labor, 1991). The ILO (2019, p. 44) also mentions "glass walls," which describe how gender segregation in management roles restricts the talent pool available for enterprises to consider for top executive and CEO positions. Women too often experience a "sticky floor" and too rarely break through the "glass ceiling" (Wirth, 2001) a discriminatory employment pattern keeps a certain group of people at the bottom of the hierarchy.

There are no clear and easy-to-see rules that definitively prove a glass ceiling exists in a company (ILO, 2019). However, companies are striving to eliminate these disparities by fixing the leaky pipeline, employing many women, and moving into junior and middle management, but they are not progressing to higher critical mass levels (ILO, 2019, p. 46).

3   Gender Equality within the European Union

Gender equality is one of the European Union's core values. All people, in all their diversity, should be free to live their chosen lives, thrive socially and economically, participate, and take the lead as equals. Although inequalities remain, the EU has made substantial advances in gender equality in the past decades. This is the result of i) legislation ii) gender mainstreaming - integration of the gender perspective into all other policies and iii) specific measures for the empowerment of women (European Commission, 2020). One of the focus areas of the EU is equal participation and leadership. The Gender Action Plan III urges the EU to address the root causes of gender inequality through a transformative strategy, aiming to empower women and girls as catalysts for change (Commission, 2022).

3.1   Gender Equality Acts in the EU

Beginning with the International Year of Women in 1975, the United Nations started to focus heavily on the status of women globally. The most significant accomplishment during this period was the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, which stands as one of the primary international human rights agreements (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (BMEIA), 2023).

In the EU, the development of a robust initiative for gender equality began in 1997 with Article 119 (now Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) (Jacquot, 2014). Before that, the Union's primary focus was in the context of an economic community founded on implementing a Single Market. Gender equality policies in Europe evolved through a series of treaties and the expanding authority of the community. These developments were influenced by factors such as the enlargement of the European Union, the political dynamics within the Council and the Commission, and the significant contributions of women like Jacqueline Nonon, Éliane Vogel-Polsky, Barbara Helfferich, and Eryl McNally

(Jacquot, 2014). As a result, the EU is often regarded as one of the world's most progressive political systems. This policy relied on various tools, including laws such as treaties, directives, and legal rulings, to ensure fair treatment and pay in the workplace and social security systems. It also addressed parental and maternity leave, protected pregnant workers and new mothers, and defined the rights of self-employed workers and their spouses. Furthermore, it prohibited discrimination, including harassment, and allowed affirmative actions to support underrepresented genders (Jacquot, 2014).

The EU has pursued gender equality and women's empowerment through action plans in its development initiatives. In 2010, the first Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development (2010-2015) was adopted. This plan aimed to enhance the EU's role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in development, focusing on allocating sufficient human and financial resources.

By 2015, nearly half of the EU's Official Development Assistance was dedicated to initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. Following this, in November 2015, the Gender Action Plan II, titled 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020' (GAP II) was introduced. This plan reinforced the EU's commitment to advancing gender equality globally, focusing on making tangible progress in the lives of women and girls. It outlined key thematic areas of action, including ensuring the physical and psychological well-being of girls and women, promoting their social and economic rights and empowerment, and strengthening their participation and voice in decision-making processes (European Commission, 2022).

The proportion of new external initiatives prioritizing gender equality as a primary or important goal has risen from 64.71% in 2019, before the implementation of GAP III, to 72% in 2022, as part of efforts to achieve the goal of 85% by 2025. Funding from the EU with policy goals centered on gender

equality and women's empowerment has surged from approximately €9 billion in 2021 to €13 billion in 2022. The implementation of the Global Gateway strategy, released in December 2021, will enhance gender equality by incorporating the objectives of GAP III (European Commission, 2023).

3.1.1 EU Initiatives

Research indicates that a substantial transformation in institutional culture is the most crucial factor in enhancing outcomes related to the psychological and physical well-being, economic and social empowerment, and participation of girls and women (European Commission, 2015).

The Commission services and the European External Action Service (EEAS) will persist in ensuring that commitments concerning gender equality are translated into evident and meaningful results, coupled with enhanced coordination, coherence, leadership, gender-based evidence, and analysis. Moreover, they will strive to ensure sufficient financial and human resources to support these endeavors. To achieve these aims, the Commission services and the EEAS plan to maintain their investment in various initiatives (European Commission, 2015).

Improve how well people work together on different levels: globally, by engaging with UN entities and other international allies, including multi-stakeholder partnerships; nationally, by partnering with governments; and locally, by involving girls and women's organizations, local authorities and community figures. Additionally, opportunities to extend the impact of interventions by collaborating with the private sector, social entrepreneurs, and grassroots organizations will be explored (European Commission, 2015).

As an initial outcome of the Strategy, the Commission introduced binding measures for pay transparency on March 4, 2021. The Pay Transparency Directive was formally adopted in May 2023. These regulations aim to enforce the long-standing principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, established

in the Treaty in 1957, thereby ensuring its practical realization (European Commission, 2020).

Another significant milestone is the Directive on gender balance in corporate boards, designed to enhance gender balance in decision-making positions within the largest listed companies in the EU. After a decade of negotiations, the Directive was ultimately endorsed on November 22, 2022. This new legislation will help dismantle the barriers preventing women from reaching top positions on corporate boards, offering qualified women a genuine opportunity to attain such roles (European Commission, 2020).

Starting in August 2022, new EU-wide rights concerning work-life balance for parents and carers began to take effect. In September 2022, the Commission unveiled the European Care Strategy, alongside new targets for early childhood education and care, aimed at boosting women's participation in the labor market (European Commission, 2020).

On March 8, 2023, the European Commission initiated a campaign to challenge gender stereotypes, known as the #EndGenderStereotypes campaign. This campaign, disseminated throughout 2023, aimed to address gender stereotypes impacting both men and women across various aspects of life, including career choices, shared care responsibilities, and decision-making (European Commission, 2020).

3.1.2 At National Level

Drawing from thorough gender country profiles, EU Delegations and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions should develop detailed 'country-level implementation plans' in collaboration with EU Member States embassies (European Commission, 2020, p. 5).

The EU is encouraged to partner with national gender equality networks and ministries, offering support for relevant national and sectoral gender equality strategies (ERA LEARN, 2023). Such collaboration is crucial for ensuring the enduring effectiveness of EU initiatives. Furthermore, the EU is urged to maintain

ongoing dialogue regarding implementing GAP III and to engage with diverse stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society organizations, women's rights advocates, human rights defenders, youth groups, and religious and faith-based organizations.

The plans for how the EU works with community groups will include considering how men and women are affected and ensuring that women's and girls' groups and smaller community groups are included. The EU should work closely with international organizations like the UN and partner with businesses to support fairness between genders and to uphold business and human rights standards (European Commission, 2020).

The figures presented illustrate the Gender Equality Index for Austria and Greece, benchmarked against the European Union average, over the period from 2013 to 2022. These comparisons highlight the progress and disparities in gender equality within these regions.
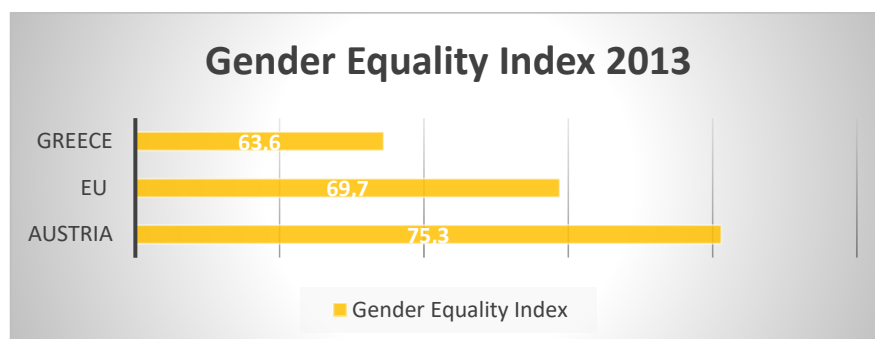
Figure 3 Gender Equality Index - Comparing Work Scores 2013 (own illustration, based on European Institute for gender equality, 2013)
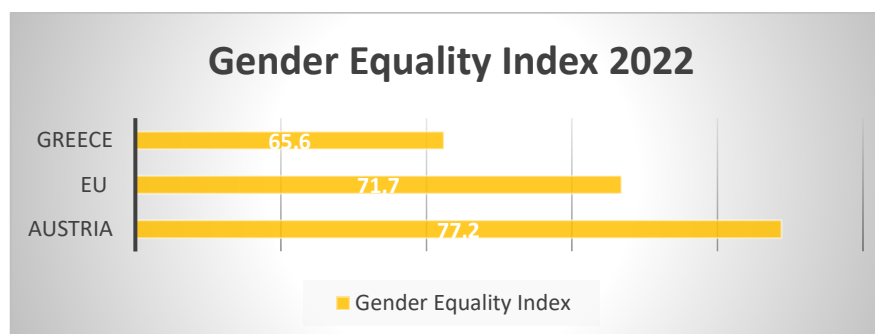

Figure 4 Gender Equality Index - Comparing Work Scores 2022 (own illustration, based on European Institute for gender equality,2022)

3.2 Country Profile: Austria

Austria is a landlocked country of approximately 8.95 million inhabitants in Central Europe. Austria is a parliamentary representative democracy. Vienna is the capital and largest city, with a population exceeding 1.9 million (City of Vienna, 2023). Austria is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, with a nominal per capita GDP of $69,069 (Ventura, 2024). The country has developed a high standard of living and, in 2019, was ranked 18th in the world on the Human Development Index. Austria has been a member of the United Nations since 1955, joined the European Union in 1995, and is a founder of the OECD (Austrian Embassy Washington, 2020).

Austria regularly sends a high-level delegation to the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). It actively participates in the negotiations for the agreed-upon conclusions. Austria is a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the period 2021-2025 (beginning at the end of March 2021) The UN Agency for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Population Fund UNFPA (UNFPA) are other important partner organizations in strengthening women's rights (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (BMEIA), 2023). On August 8, 2007, the Austrian Federal Government approved the initial Austrian National Action Plan for Executing Resolution 1325 - the first United Nations (UN) resolution to emphasize the specific effects of conflicts on women and stress the significance of women's involvement in all stages of peace initiatives. This plan outlines measures to be taken at national, regional, and international levels. The implementation of the National Action Plan on the Protection of Women against Violence, adopted in 2014, continues to be a national priority. (BMEIA, 2023)

3.2.1 Gender Equality Laws and Policies

The Austrian government actively supports initiatives to promote full and productive employment and ensure decent work opportunities for women. Key focus areas include eliminating gender-based discrimination in labor markets and

implementing and enforcing minimum wage standards. These efforts align with the overarching goal of fostering inclusive and equitable economic growth (UN Women, 2020) . Here are some of the initiatives aimed at achieving these objectives:

The FiT – Women in Crafts and Technology program aims to enhance the skills of women in non-traditional fields. This initiative plays a significant role in achieving two key equality objectives: breaking down gender-specific job segregation and narrowing the gender pay gap. In 2017, approximately 1,230 women completed apprenticeships in crafts or technology through the FiT program. Moreover, the program supports apprenticeships for women and girls in unconventional professions. Each year, a budget of EUR 5 million is dedicated to subsidizing company-based apprenticeships. This funding covers various professional areas, including mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, mechatronics, information technology, material technology, technical drawing, and process technology (UN Women, 2020, pp. 2-3).

The Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs, in collaboration with the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG), is implementing the w-fFORTE program to enhance career opportunities for highly qualified women in research and technology. This initiative provides career coaching, quarterly Co-Create Careers Circle sessions, and workshops on teamwork for female researchers and entrepreneurs in research and innovation (R&I). The first phase of w-fFORTE INNOVATORINNEN, held from June 2020 to April 2021, involved 21 female R&I practitioners aiming to advance significant social or business ideas, with a focus on increasing the visibility of women in R&I and creative roles (FFG, 2023).

The Laura Bassi 4.0 program, initiated by the Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs and implemented by the FFG, supports digitization initiatives and promotes equal opportunities in the digital realm. It offers opportunities for women to shape digitization through two calls, with a network on Digitization and

Equal Opportunity providing a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge (EIGE, 2022).

FEMtech, led by the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology, focuses on improving working conditions and career opportunities for women in research and technology. It supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in addressing equality-related issues, offers female students internship opportunities, and finances research projects to improve gender justice in product and technology development. The Ministry has also set equal opportunity goals within the Human Potential Strategy 2030 for RTI, aiming to enable equal opportunities on both structural and discursive levels (EIGE, 2022).

Addressing the persistent challenge of gender wage gaps remains a priority, with Austria still significantly above the EU average despite progress. The gender pay gap decreased from 25.5 percent in 2007 to 19.9 percent in 2017, though it remains higher than the EU average of 16.0 percent. To enhance transparency, companies have been required to produce income reports since 2011, expanding gradually to include those with over 150 employees since 2014. A government evaluation from 2013-2018 assessed the effectiveness of Equal Treatment Act provisions mandating the declaration of minimum wages in job ads and income reporting. This analysis aimed to gauge the impact on income transparency, leading to further initiatives to promote equal pay (UN Women, 2020, p. 4).

The Fair Wage project was launched to raise awareness about fair wages and company income transparency. It introduced a toolbox for developing, analyzing, and utilizing income reports, along with promoting the benefits of fair wages for companies through positive communication and sharing best practices (UN Women, 2020, p. 4).

The Council of Ministers recently decided to expand all-day schools, setting an ambitious goal to double the available places by 2025. This expansion

addresses the need for increased educational opportunities and aims to enhance the reconciliation of work and family life for both women and men. Moreover, there's a notable focus on encouraging father's participation in parental leave and unpaid care work through a major project undertaken by several ministries in collaboration with academia, research institutions, and social partners. This project underscores a concerted effort to promote gender equality in caregiving responsibilities and foster more equitable family dynamics (UN Women, 2016, p. 1).

The Austrian federal government is dedicated to enhancing female representation on the supervisory boards of state-owned companies, aiming for at least 50% federal involvement. This initiative serves as a directive to other delegating entities as well. Initially, by the close of 2019, the government pledged to achieve a 35% quota for women, as outlined in a resolution by the Council of Ministers on July 31, 2019. Subsequently, in a resolution dated June 3, 2020, the government further committed to elevating the women's quota to 40% (UN Women, 2023, p. 2).

3.2.2 Gender Equality Index in Austria

Austria ranks 10th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, scoring 71.2 out of 100, 1.0 point higher than the EU average. The data for the 2023 Index primarily reflects information from 2021 and 2022. The Gender Equality Index assigns scores from 1 to 100, with a score of 100 indicating full equality between women and men (EIGE, 2023).

Austria excels in finances, ranking 4th among all EU Member States with 88.2 points. Since 2020, Austria has improved in this domain by 0.7 points, advancing by two places in the rankings. This domain evaluates gender disparities in financial access and economic status. Financial resources assess monthly earnings and income, including wages, pensions, and other sources, measured by purchasing power standard (PPS). Economic resources measure poverty risk and

income distribution through indicators such as poverty rates and income inequality among genders (EIGE, 2023).

Gender disparities are particularly evident in the domain of power, where the country scores 55.4 points and ranks 15th. Although Austria's score has increased by 3.7 points since 2020, its ranking has remained unchanged due to faster progress in other Member States. In social decision-making, Austria scores 65.3 points, ranking 10th, representing a four-place improvement since 2020. The power domain assesses gender equality in decision-making across political, economic, and social spheres. Political power evaluates representation in national parliaments, government, and local assemblies. Economic decision-making examines gender balance on corporate boards and central banks. The Gender Equality Index now includes data on social power, encompassing decision-making in research funding, media, and sports organizations (EIGE, 2023).

Since 2020, Austria has experienced a decline in its score within the work domain, dropping nine places in its ranking among EU Member States. Austria holds a score of 76.4 points in this domain, ranking 13th overall. "In Austria, a notable concern revolves around the imbalance in part-time employment attributed to caregiving responsibilities," observes Claudia Eder, Head of Brand & Communications at karriere.at, Austria's foremost job portal. The figures speak volumes: 13% of men opt for part-time roles, while 51% of women choose this option. These statistics underscore the systemic challenges confronting women, ranging from gender and age prejudices to deeply ingrained stereotypes perpetuated in language and visuals (Sternbauer, 2023).

The work domain assesses the extent to which women and men have equal access to employment opportunities and favorable working conditions. Participation, a sub-domain, combines indicators such as full-time equivalent (FTE) employment rates and the duration of working life. FTE employment rates consider the prevalence of part-time work among women, comparing individual

average work hours to those of full-time employees. Segregation and quality of work are addressed in the second sub-domain, which measures sectorial segregation and job quality factors. Sectorial segregation evaluates participation rates of women and men in sectors like education and healthcare. Factors like flexible work arrangements and career prospects determine job quality. Flexibility is gauged by the ability of individuals to take time off during work hours for personal or family needs. The Career Prospects Index, measured on a scale from 0 to 100, assesses employment continuity, job security, advancement opportunities, and workplace development.
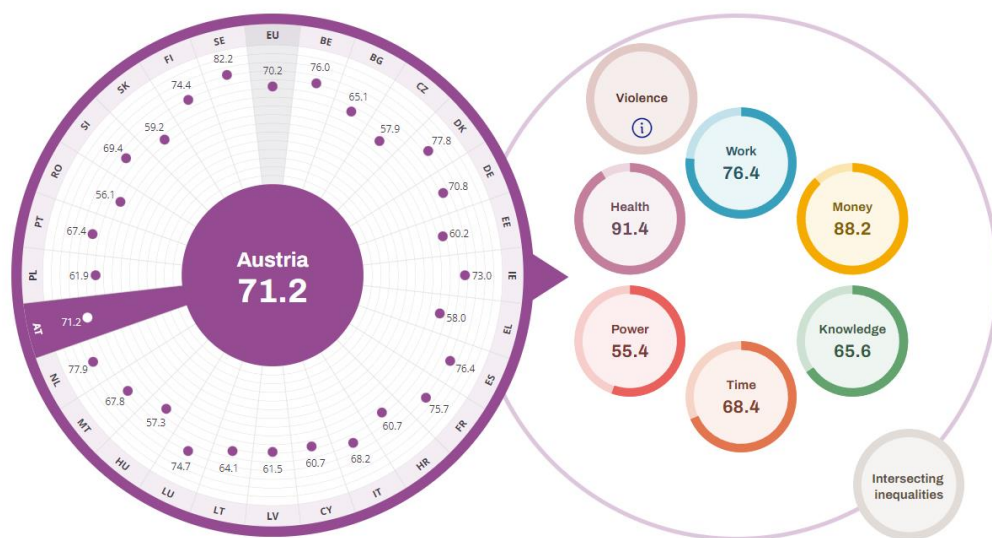
Figure 5 - Austria Gender Equality Index in 2023 edition (EIGE,2023)

3.2.3 Education and Workforce Participation

In Austria, there has been a notable trend of increasing participation of women in higher education, surpassing men in enrolment rates. According to the Federal Statistical Office of Austria, as of the winter semester 2022/23, women constituted 56 percent of all university students, with 219,754 women enrolled compared to 173,480 men. This marks a significant shift, with over 46,000 more female students enrolled in Austrian institutions during the respective semester (Erudera News, 2023).

However, in 2019, the proportions of women entering engineering, manufacturing, and construction programs and information and communication technologies were notably low at 23% and 18%, respectively. In contrast, the field of education, historically favored by women, saw a higher representation of female newcomers, accounting for 78%. In Austria, the gender distribution among teachers across all education levels indicates that men make up 34% of teachers, slightly higher than the OECD average of 30% (OECD, 2021).

On the other hand, workforce participation follows a different pattern. The employment rate among women has shown a consistent upward trend in recent years. In 2018, women aged 15 to 64 exhibited a labor market participation rate of 70.7 percent, while the rate for men stood at 81.6 percent. However, a notable disparity emerges in the prevalence of part-time employment, with 48.3 percent of women opting for part-time work compared to only 10.3 percent of men. This significant discrepancy in part-time employment rates poses a key challenge and continues to exacerbate income disparities among genders (OHCHR Commissioned Report, 2013).

Women in Austria continue to face a persistent challenge in income equality compared to men, with one of the highest disparities among other countries. As of 2014, the (unadjusted) gender pay gap, which measures the difference between men's and women's gross hourly earnings, was 22.9 percent for Austria compared to an average gender pay gap in the EU-28 of 16.1 percent (Bergmann et al., 2018).

For instance 2011, legislation was introduced mandating companies to prepare internal income reports. Since 2014, this requirement has been extended to biannual reports for companies with over 150 employees. Additionally, companies must disclose the minimum collective wage and the potential for higher earnings in job vacancy postings. These measures are steps towards addressing the gender-specific income gap in Austria. (OHCHR Commissioned Report, 2013).

3.3 Country Profile: Greece

Greece is a country located in Southern Europe with a population of approximately 10.4 million people (The Wrold Bank, 2023). It is known for its rich history, ancient civilization, and cultural heritage all over the world (Hornblower, 2024). The capital and largest city of Greece is Athens. The country has faced economic challenges in recent years, echoing the struggles experienced by many countries during times of financial crisis (IMF, 2019) . These challenges have rippled through society, affecting pivotal areas such as gender equality and the opportunities available for women in leadership roles (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020).

Examining Greece's progress on key issues regarding equality, emancipation, and the general social health of Greek society shows that the country, especially when stacked up against other EU countries, is performing relatively weakly (Theodoridis, 2018). Based on 2018 figures, Greece polled last amongst all EU countries according to the Gender Equality Index 2020. Attaining a score of 52.2 out of 100–16.2 points below the EU average (EIGE, 2020).

To grasp Greece's current state, it's crucial to delve into the socio-historical factors shaping its trajectory. Post-WWII, Greece emerged as a somewhat successful developing economy but faced significant social unrest, culminating in military rule from 1967-1975 (Lyberaki & Tinios, 2016). During this time, traditional patriarchal structures prevailed, with men as breadwinners and women relegated to unpaid domestic roles within nuclear families. However, starting around 1980, spurred by global trends of increased female workforce participation and local activism, Greece began making strides in gender equality (Davaki, 2013, p. 6). Initiatives by the Social Democratic Party PASOK in 1980, such as legalizing abortion and divorce and outlawing gender discrimination and dowry, marked significant progress (Davaki, 2013, p. 15). However, the issue resides precisely in the stagnant state of the debt-laden economy (Davaki, 2013).

Yet, Greece faced setbacks, notably the financial crash and subsequent Eurozone debt crisis, hitting the country hardest among European nations (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). IMF bailout conditions triggered stringent austerity measures, disproportionately impacting women not only through cuts in essential social services supporting gender equality (Elomäki, 2012), but also due to the marginality effect. This phenomenon underscores women's vulnerability in the job market as they often hold precarious positions as new hires or marginal employees, characterized by weaker attachment and shorter experience. Consequently, they are often the first to lose their jobs, facing obstacles in reemployment due to entrenched social stereotypes and seniority rules that favor men. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as "last in, first out" (LIFO) (Lyberaki & Tinios, 2016, p. 19). Despite legislative efforts to uphold gender equality (Koukoulis-Spiliotopoulos & Petroglou, 2018) , the aftermath of the financial crisis continues to hinder substantive progress, challenging successive governments' efforts, including the socialist SYRIZA coalition (2015-2019) and the current Christian Democrats (since 2019) (Koukoulis-Spiliotopoulos & Petroglou, 2018).

3.3.1 Gender Equality Laws and Policies

Since 2008, annual work-life balance programs have provided childcare services to mothers in Greece who are unemployed, self-employed, or employed in the private sector and meet low-income criteria. These programs, co-funded by the EU, focus on Early Childhood Care and nurseries for children (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020, p. 2).

The "SHARE" Project (2020-2022) aimed to challenge traditional gender family roles and promote work-life balance by enhancing company environments through capacity-building and raising awareness of men's role in achieving such balance (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020, p. 2).

Implemented under Law 4837/2021, the "Nannies of the Neighborhood" program assists working mothers with childcare for babies aged 2 months to 2.5

years. It offers financial support through vouchers to cover a portion of childcare costs, facilitating mothers' reintegration into the labor market and reducing undeclared work (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020, p. 3).

The legislation under Law 4706/2020 addressing corporate governance introduces a groundbreaking gender quota requiring at least 25% representation of women on listed company boards. This law seeks to update the internal framework of listed companies, enhancing their independence to align with contemporary capital market standards. It includes measures to promote broader gender inclusion in boardrooms through mandatory quotas and mandates companies to establish diverse criteria for director selection. As of the conclusion of 2022, all Greek companies have met the stipulated 25% quota requirement (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020, p. 4).

The "PEGASUS" project, which addressed the gender pension gap in Greece (2018-2020), examined the issue of the gender pension gap on a multifaceted basis and made policy proposals incorporated into the current Gender Equality Action Plan. A tool was created on the project's website to calculate future pensions (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2020, p. 4).

In 2006, Law 3488/2006 against gender discrimination in the labor market was approved by the Greek parliament in order to promote equal pay for equal work and measures against sexual harassment (Kambouri, 2013, p. 3).

Definition no 67 is added to Article 3, paragraph 1 of Law 4261/2014 (Government Gazette, Series I, No 107), and reads as follows: 'gender-neutral remuneration policy' means a remuneration policy based on equal pay between female and male workers for similar work or work of equal value (General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2021, p. 19).

According to UN independent experts, Greece is lagging behind other countries in the European Union on women's rights despite legal and policy frameworks being in place because of poor implementation, the persistence of

discrimination, and the lingering impacts of the crisis and austerity measures (OHCHR, 2019).

3.3.2 Gender Equality Index in Greece

The gender equality index data for Greece in 2023 predominantly reflects information from 2021 and 2022. This index, which assigns scores ranging from 1 to 100 to the EU and its member states, represents full equality with a score of 100. Greece ranks 24th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, scoring 58.0 out of 100. This figure falls 12.2 points below the EU average score (EIGE, 2023).

Since 2010, Greece has seen a notable increase of 9.4 points in its score. Particularly, since 2020, Greece's overall score has risen by 4.6 points, marking one of the most significant advancements among the Member States. The enhancements in the time domain have predominantly propelled Greece's overall score upwards. Furthermore, Greece has made strides in the work domain, increasing 3.1 points since 2020. As a result of its faster progress compared to other EU nations, Greece has ascended three places in the overall ranking since 2020 (EIGE, 2023).

In health, Greece achieves its highest score of 85.5 points, securing the 17th position. Over the years, Greece has made notable progress in the health domain, ascending from 19th in 2010 to 17th in 2021. The health domain assesses gender equality across three key aspects: health status, behavior, and access to health services. Health status evaluates variations in life expectancy between genders and self-reported health and disability-free life expectancy. Health behavior encompasses various factors such as fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity, smoking, and alcohol consumption, following WHO guidelines on healthy behavior. Access to health services is measured through the percentage of individuals reporting unmet medical and dental needs (EIGE, 2023).

Gender inequalities are strongly pronounced in the work domain (68.7 points). Greece's lowest ranking is in this domain, in 25th place. Since 2010, Greece's ranking in this domain has only improved by one place, although the

country's score has improved by 3.1 points since 2020. Within the domain of work, Greece's lowest ranking is in the sub-domain of participation in employment (second to last among all Member States); however, the country achieves its lowest score in the sub-domain of segregation and quality of work (64.6 points) (EIGE, 2023).

Since 2020, Greece has witnessed significant progress in its score, particularly in time, marking an impressive increase of 22.4 points. This advancement has propelled the country's ranking from 26th to 13th, marking the most substantial improvement among all Member States. The surge in the sub-domain of care activities, with a remarkable increase of 23.9 points since 2020, has been instrumental in driving this change. Moreover, Greece has seen notable growth in the sub-domain of social activities, with a commendable increase of 20.9 points, elevating its ranking by 16 places to stand at 7th place. The time domain assesses gender disparities in allocating time spent on caregiving, domestic work, and social activities. The first sub-domain, focusing on care activities, measures gender gaps in the involvement of women and men in caring for children or elderly family members and their participation in household chores. The second sub-domain evaluates gender differences in engagement in social activities, including sports, cultural, and leisure pursuits outside the home, as well as involvement in voluntary and charitable endeavors (EIGE, 2023).

Since 2020, Greece has experienced a decline in its score within the money domain, with a decrease of 1.1 points. Over the years, Greece's ranking among Member States has also dropped, sliding from 16th place in 2010 to 23rd in 2021. This downturn is partly attributed to escalating gender disparities observed in the sub-domains of the economic situation (a decrease of 2.2 points) and financial resources (a decrease of 0.4 points) between 2020 and 2021. The money domain evaluates gender inequalities in access to financial resources and the economic status of women and men. The first sub-domain, financial resources, examines monthly earnings and income, incorporating indicators such as mean monthly

earnings from work and mean equivalised net income. The latter encompasses earnings from paid work, pensions, investments, benefits, and other income sources, all expressed in purchasing power standard (PPS) to account for price level differences between Member States. The second sub-domain, economic resources, assesses the risk of poverty and income distribution among women and men. This includes indicators like the percentage of the population not at risk of poverty and the ratio of income inequality among women and men, measured by the disparity between the bottom and top quintiles (EIGE, 2023).
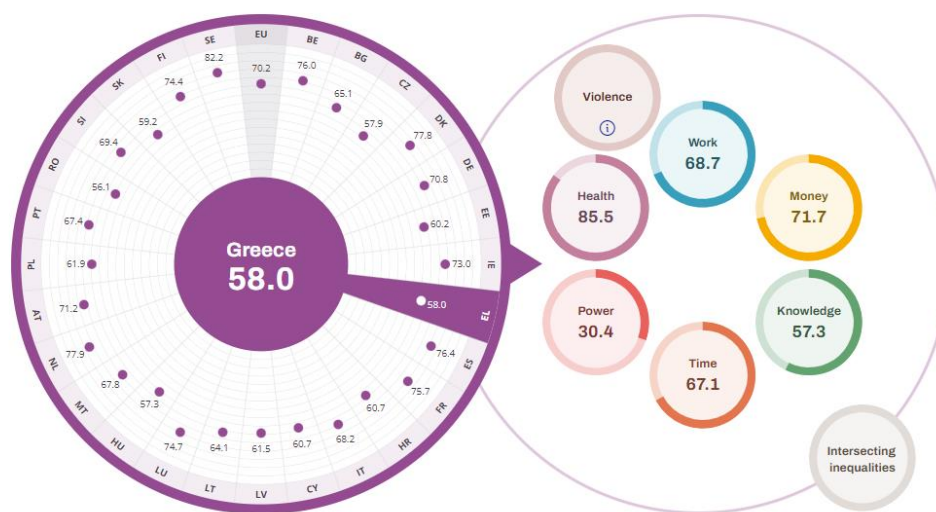
Figure 6 - Greece Gender Equality Index in 2023 edition (EIGE,2023)

3.3.3 Education and Workforce Participation

In recent years, the enrolment of female students in Greek universities has seen a notable rise. This trend is accompanied by the observation that girls generally outperform boys academically, resulting in a higher proportion of female students gaining admission to higher education institutions (Kambouri, 2013, p. 6). Over the past decade, tertiary educational attainment in Greece has significantly increased, surpassing the EU-level target set for 2030. Greek society strongly emphasizes higher education, as statistics show that in 2022, 45.2% of Greeks aged 25-34 held a tertiary education degree, compared to the EU average of 42%. This marks a 1 percentage point increase from the previous year and a

10.7 percentage point increase over the past decade, outpacing the average EU increase of 7.9 percentage points (Eurostat, 2024).

Although The gender gap in favor of women in tertiary-level attainment remains substantial, in 2019, Greece also recorded the highest unemployment rate in the EU for tertiary-educated women, at 14.5%, vs the EU-level average of 3.5% (European Commission, 2023, p. 13). According to Greece's public employment service (OAED), out of 1.1 mil. listed unemployed who actively searched for a job in December 2021, only 36.4% were male, while the majority (63.6%) were female (Manalis & Matsaganis, 2022).

Women are disproportionately represented in fields such as education, humanities, and social studies, which typically offer lower wages. Conversely, women tend to be underrepresented in fields like natural sciences and technology, where wages are higher (Kambouri, 2013, p. 6).However, Greece is one of the Member States with a high proportion of female STEM graduates. In 2021, approximately one in five female graduates was a science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) graduate (vs the EU average of 15%). In 2021, women represented 34.8% of ICT graduates (EU: 21.2%) (European Commission, 2023, p. 13).

3.4   Gender Equality Index Comparison

After examining the gender equality index for Austria and Greece, a direct comparison reveals where significant gaps persist. Austria, for instance, leads in the money indicator with a score of 88.2, ranking 4th among EU Member States, while Greece follows with a 16.5-point gap. This disparity has profound implications for gender equality and economic outcomes. Austria's higher score reflects better access to financial resources and greater economic stability for women, including higher mean monthly earnings and income security. Conversely, Greece's lower score indicates larger income gaps between men and women, presenting greater challenges in achieving economic parity and higher levels of income inequality.

The significant difference in work scores between Austria (76.4) and Greece (68.7) further highlights disparities in gender equality and economic participation. Austria's higher score suggests better access to full-time equivalent employment, job security, and career advancement opportunities for women, fostering greater economic growth. In contrast, Greece's lower score indicates challenges such as higher rates of part-time employment among women, limiting economic advancement and perpetuating gender disparities. Targeted policies addressing these differences could enhance economic opportunities and improve work conditions for women in both countries.

In the domain of knowledge, Austria (65.6) again outperforms Greece (57.3), indicating significant implications for gender equality in educational attainment and participation. Austria's higher score suggests better gender parity in educational attainment, with more women and men completing tertiary education and participating in lifelong learning. In contrast, Greece's lower score reflects greater gender disparities, possibly due to lower tertiary graduation rates among women and limited access to ongoing education. Targeted policies could improve educational opportunities for women in Greece, promoting gender equality in knowledge acquisition and educational participation across both countries.

Lastly, the substantial difference in power scores between Austria (55.4) and Greece (30.4) underscores significant disparities in gender equality in decision-making roles across political, economic, and social spheres. Austria's higher score indicates greater female representation in national parliaments, government, and corporate boards, suggesting more opportunities for women to influence policy-making and economic decisions, leading to more inclusive governance and business practices. In contrast, Greece's lower score reflects fewer women in positions of power, highlighting challenges such as underrepresentation in leadership roles. Addressing these disparities through targeted initiatives could promote greater gender balance in decision-making

processes, enhancing overall gender equality in Austria and Greece and fostering more equitable and inclusive societies.

The following graph illustrates the gender equality scores across all EU countries, providing a clear benchmark to understand where Austria and Greece stand relative to their peers. Austria's scores consistently rank among the highest, highlighting its strong performance in various domains of gender equality. In contrast, Greece's scores reveal areas where significant improvements are needed to close the gender gap. This comparison underscores the varying levels of progress within the EU and highlights the specific areas where targeted policies and initiatives can help promote greater gender equality.
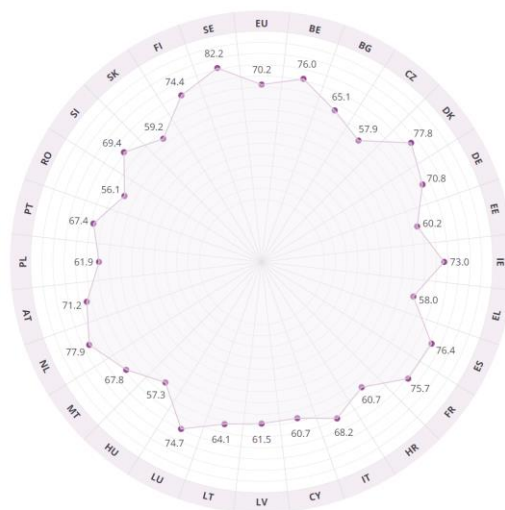
Figure 7 Gender Equality Index in all EU countries (EIGE, 2023)

3.5 Hofstede Comparison: Greece and Austria

The Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) proposed by Hofstede- a Dutch scholar specializing in management studies- is a valuable tool for comprehending the diverse cultural norms prevalent across nations and their influence on business practices. This framework enables the differentiation of national cultures, delineates cultural dimensions, elucidates their implications on social conventions, and aids effective communication spanning various domains such as commerce and international relations (Wale, 2020).
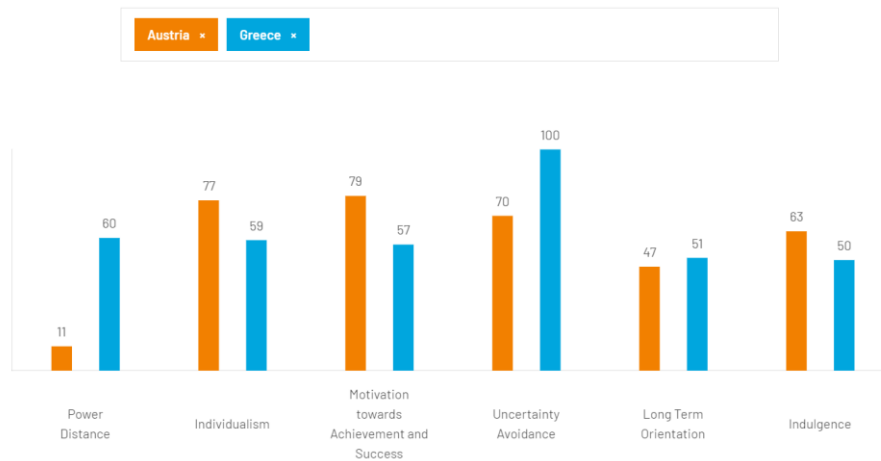
Figure 8 - Country Comparison Tool: Austria and Greece (Hofstede Insights,2023)

The image above illustrates the six dimensions of the theory alongside the scores of different countries as analyzed by the researcher. A significant disparity arises notably between Austria and Greece concerning "Power distance." This dimension, captured by the power distance index, indicates a society's acceptance of inequality and hierarchical power arrangements.

Greece's high score of 60 suggests a culture that worships hierarchy embraces power differentials, and favors bureaucratic structures, emphasizing respect for authority and rank. In companies, there is one boss who takes complete responsibility. One should never forget that in the mind of a Greek, all other cultures in the Western world inherited something from the ancient Greek culture. Status symbols of power are very important to indicate social position and "communicate" the respect that could be shown (Hofstede Insights, 2023) .

In contrast, Austria's low score of 11 reflects a culture valuing individual independence, where hierarchy exists for practicality rather than dominance. Equal rights are emphasized, with superiors readily accessible and leaders adopting coaching roles to empower their teams. Power is decentralized, with managers relying on the expertise of their team members. Employees expect to be involved in decision-making processes, favoring direct and participative communication styles while disliking excessive control (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

Another contrast between Greece and Austria emerges from the dimension of Individualism. This dimension examines how societies prioritize group cohesion versus individual autonomy. Austria exemplifies a markedly individualistic society, with 77 points where the focus lies on personal accomplishment and rights, prioritizing the needs of oneself and immediate family members. Greece demonstrates a more balanced cultural outlook, scoring slightly above the midpoint on the individualism spectrum. This balance indicates a cultural inclination towards both individualism and collectivism. Individuals from collectivist backgrounds typically prioritize relationships and loyalty, with a collective sense of identity labeled as "We," contrasting with the more individualistic orientations prevalent in Austrian society (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

Notably, Greece boasts a perfect score of 100 on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, whereas Austria trails by 30 points. This dimension explores how societies navigate unfamiliar territory, uncertainty, and unforeseen circumstances. Embodying this dimension, Greece demonstrates a low tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty, and risk. Strategies to minimize the unknown are prevalent, marked by strict adherence to established rules and regulations. Both institutional frameworks and individual behaviors within Greek society prioritize measures to mitigate uncertainty—conversely, Austria's score of 70 signals a notable tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Here, a less rigid regulatory framework embraces the unknown more openly. Like Austria, cultures and individuals with lower uncertainty avoidance tendencies often find solace in unstructured scenarios or dynamic environments (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

In nations scoring high on motivation toward achievement and success, such as Austria, which has a robust score of 79, a competitive spirit drives society, emphasizing achievement and success, often defined by one's position as a winner or the best in their field. This value system permeates from educational institutions into organizational life, where individuals "work to live," managers

are expected to make decisive choices, and equity, competition, and performance are paramount. Conflicts tend to be resolved through direct confrontation, a phenomenon vividly observed during election periods, characterized by intense, no-holds-barred battles between candidates (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

With a score of 57, Greece occupies a middle ground within the Motivation toward Achievement and Success spectrum. Here, familial honor plays a significant role, with men considering it a personal duty to provide for their families. In collectivistic and decisive cultures like Greece's, the success of one member reflects positively on the entire family or in-group. Therefore, it's common for Greeks to mention acquaintances' notable achievements when meeting new individuals proudly. The iconic figure of Aristotle Onassis, the Greek tycoon celebrated globally, serves as a prime example of success in a decisive society, his status symbols symbolizing exceptional achievements (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

The indulgence versus restraint dimension evaluates a society's inclination and capacity to gratify its desires. Austria, scoring 63 on this dimension, reflects indulgence characteristics. In societies with high indulgence scores, individuals are typically willing to indulge their impulses and desires, prioritizing enjoyment and fun. They often maintain a positive outlook, embrace optimism, and value leisure activities significantly. Furthermore, they tend to act according to their preferences and spend money freely (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

Greece, with an intermediate score of 50 on this dimension, does not exhibit a clear preference between indulgence and restraint. In such societies, the balance between indulgence and restraint is nuanced, with no dominant inclination towards either end of the spectrum (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

In the long-term orientation dimension, both countries score an average tendency towards the extent to which society views its time horizon. Overall, In Austria, where there is a strong emphasis on achievement, competition, and

performance, women may encounter barriers stemming from deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and traditional societal roles. Despite the value placed on equity, the prevailing culture of competition may perpetuate a male-dominated leadership landscape, where women may struggle to assert themselves in leadership roles due to entrenched gender biases. Additionally, the expectation for decisive leadership may pose challenges for women who may be perceived as less assertive or decisive compared to their male counterparts.

On the other hand, in Greece, where familial honor and collectivistic values are significant, women may face barriers rooted in traditional gender roles and expectations. While the importance of family may foster a supportive environment, it may also reinforce gender norms that limit women's opportunities for advancement in the workplace. The emphasis on success and achievement may further exacerbate these barriers, as women may be expected to prioritize familial responsibilities over career aspirations (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

4   Empirical Part

In the previous chapter of this thesis, an extensive examination of existing literature was undertaken to address the research inquiries. While this literature review delivered significant insights, certain aspects of the research questions still needed to be explored. To address this shortfall, a more thorough investigation will be conducted in the subsequent phase, extending beyond the confines of a traditional literature review.

The forthcoming empirical study aims to derive data and perspectives directly from participants within the observed field, either HR experts or employees in leading positions. This approach seeks to capture firsthand insights, viewpoints, and experiences that will complement and reinforce the findings of the literature review. Through these chapters, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the research methodology, data collection techniques, and analytical approaches utilized in the empirical segment of this work.

By integrating insights acquired from literature evaluation and empirical investigation, this thesis endeavors to thoroughly comprehend the research questions at hand. The empirical findings are expected to provide a nuanced perspective, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Ultimately, this holistic approach aims to contribute to a richer and more insightful topic analysis.

4.1   Research Design

A qualitative research approach examines individual experiences and viewpoints that females in leading positions face and undergo in their social reality. Researchers try to collect comprehensive and contextualized data by pursuing direct contact with study participants, frequently concentrating on a small number of significant instances. This method enables a complete analysis of the research issue, going beyond merely numerical data to comprehend the phenomena more deeply (Flick, 2009, pp. 21-24). In this study, the participants

will be individuals in leading positions or HR experts who will elaborate on their experiences and observations concerning the barriers to women's leadership in both countries. In contrast to quantitative research, which involves developing hypotheses beforehand, qualitative research does not. This trait guarantees that researchers are open to the topics, examination contexts, and investigational procedures while allowing them to accommodate new themes and unanticipated revelations (Lamnek & Krell, 2010, p. 19). Qualitative research strongly emphasizes meaningful discussion with them to fully comprehend the lived experiences, perceptions, and social interactions of the research topics (Lamnek & Krell, 2010, p. 20). Empirical qualitative research thus represents the communication between the researcher and the research topics (Lamnek & Krell, 2010, p. 20). Interviews were determined to be the best approach for expanding the gathered data to fully cover and answer the research questions in the current study.

Due to the lack of a high level of uniformity like that found in quantitative research, transparency, and understandability are of the utmost importance in qualitative research (Lamnek & Krell, 2010). This concern was addressed by using Philip Mayring's qualitative content analysis method as the evaluation method for the test outcomes. The identification and classification of significant themes and patterns within the qualitative data are made possible by this methodical and structured approach. Making the specific steps of the research more understandable to outsiders is achieved through the said approach by Mayring. It offers an open and transparent procedure for analyzing the qualitative information gathered from the expert interviews. Using this technique, the empirical research results can be presented methodically and efficiently, improving the study's rigor and credibility (Mayring, 2014).

The study also recognizes the value of reflexivity and the researcher's positionality throughout the research process. The researchers' backgrounds, experiences, and prejudices can impact the gathering and interpreting of data.

Therefore, reflexive techniques will be carefully considered, ensuring transparency and self-awareness throughout the study process (Olmos-Vegas et al., 2023).

4.2 Interview Participants and Structure

The data collection process for this study was meticulously planned and executed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, targeting individuals who occupy or have occupied leadership roles in various organizations in Austria and Greece, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives relevant to the study's objectives. The author intentionally included participants from various industries and locations within each country. Moreover, to provide a comprehensive understanding, the study involved male and female leaders and male HR experts, who offered valuable insights on the topic. This diverse selection of participants enriched the data, offering a holistic view of the barriers and opportunities for women's leadership in Austria and Greece.

Qualitative interviews prioritize thorough information collection over the pursuit of representativeness or large sample sizes. This preference stems from the common use of small sample sizes in qualitative research, which aims to delve into individuals' unique perspectives and experiences. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the emphasis lies on gathering comprehensive and intricate data from a limited number of participants (Lamnek & Krell, 2010, p. 350).

For this study, an interview guide with a partial structure was employed in light of the benefits of both unstructured and structured methodologies. Unstructured interviews, characterized by their absence of a predetermined script or set of questions, foster exploratory and open-ended discussions. This approach proves advantageous when the research topic is complex, demanding profound insights, or when firsthand experiences are scarce (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291).

Conversely, structured interviews adhere to a predetermined set of questions, potentially limiting participants' responses but with the advantage of making the responses more comparable. While structured interviews may not offer the same depth of insight in qualitative research, they can prevent participants from fully articulating their perspectives. To mitigate these drawbacks, the study employed a hybrid approach, blending specified core questions with the flexibility to delve into particular lines of inquiry.

The study facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research issue by incorporating open-ended questions within a semi-structured framework. This approach encouraged participants to provide detailed and nuanced responses, thereby enhancing the understanding of their experiences, viewpoints, and ideas (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Data saturation was achieved by continuing interviews until no new information or themes emerged, indicating that the collected data were comprehensive and robust.

The questions were crafted to directly address the research inquiries while allowing ample room for participants to expand upon their responses, potentially yielding additional data from peripheral inquiries. Throughout the interviews, questions were occasionally phrased differently to align with the natural flow of conversation and accommodate the diverse backgrounds of the participants.

In this study, 60 minutes were generally allocated for each interview session; however, it's important to note that the actual duration can fluctuate due to various factors. The length of interviews is subject to change based on factors such as the topic's complexity, the participant's willingness to share information, and their ability to articulate their thoughts effectively.

An intelligent verbatim transcription approach was utilized for the interviews, considering the need for translation and ensuring that the translated transcripts accurately conveyed the meaning of the discussions. This approach accommodated linguistic nuances and cultural contexts, ensuring the fidelity of

the data. Additionally, the oral speaking style and note-free format sometimes resulted in repetitions, incomplete sentences, and errors in speech.

The study will also examine ethical issues to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Informed consent guarantees a participant's voluntary participation, comprehension of the research's objective, confidentiality, and right to withdraw. Ethical norms shall be followed to promote honesty and respect in the study process.

Several methodological limitations were identified and addressed throughout the study. One potential limitation was selection bias, as participants were chosen based on their willingness and availability to participate, which may have excluded some relevant perspectives. To mitigate this, efforts were made to include various industries and organizational sizes.

Another limitation was the possibility of interviewer bias during data collection and analysis. To minimize this, a standardized interview guide was used, and interviews were recorded and transcribed to represent participants' responses accurately.

Despite these measures, some limitations remain inherent in qualitative research, such as the subjective nature of data interpretation and the potential for incomplete recall by participants. These limitations were acknowledged, and the findings were contextualized within these constraints, emphasizing the need for further research to validate and extend the results.

4.3 Conducting the Interviews

Virtual interviews via MS Teams offer numerous advantages, including equity, convenience, and cost-effectiveness. Virtual interviews create a relaxed environment by eliminating the need for travel, encouraging broader participation, and overcoming geographical barriers. Additionally, they save time, simplify scheduling, and allow for engagement with a diverse pool of participants. To ensure convenience and respect for experts' time, interviews are scheduled based on their preferences and availability.

The moment the interviews are scheduled, the interviewer receives the main questions to familiarize themselves, enhancing the process's authenticity and efficiency (Gill et al., 2008). From the author's side, active listening is crucial to understanding participants' insights fully, and post-interview, expressing gratitude and inviting additional input ensures a comprehensive examination of the research issue (Gill et al., 2008).

The study's experts were recruited using online platforms and personal networks and categorized based on gender, experience, and relevance to the study's subject, ensuring diverse perspectives. This systematic approach aims to enrich the study's findings and deepen understanding as much as possible, given the participants' willingness.

To ensure ethical data practices, the author strictly followed the research and Master's Thesis guidelines from FH JOANNEUM. Upholding participant privacy, confidentiality, and respecting data protection rules were central to this study. All gathered data was solely used for the thesis and stored securely. Before recording interviews, participants were asked for consent. After the submission of the master thesis, interview recordings were permanently deleted. Transcripts were shared with participants if requested, allowing for review and edits. Permission to use these transcripts in the thesis was obtained and documented. The thesis omitted real names and identifying details to protect participant identities.

Category 1

Participants in the first category comprise female employees occupying high-level positions and leadership roles, having significant influence within their respective organizations, or overseeing teams of individuals. Their perspectives offer invaluable insights into the primary research question of this study, shedding light on the barriers they faced and still face, how they perceive the glass ceiling, and how they broke it.

Category 2

The second category comprises male employees in high-level positions within organizations. Interviewing male leaders provides a unique perspective distinct from female leaders, offering insights into diverse experiences and viewpoints within the organizational landscape on the same topic. While female leaders may offer subjective insights rooted in their direct experiences, male leaders bring a different lens shaped by their distinct professional journeys and perspectives. By including male voices in the study, a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and challenges across genders can be attained, enriching the research findings and fostering a more inclusive dialogue.

Category 3

The third category comprises male and female HR experts who bring a unique perspective shaped by their professional experience navigating organizational policies and practices. Their insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from the lens of human resource expertise, offering valuable insights into how organizations address gender-related issues within the framework of their policies and procedures. By including HR professionals in the study, we gain valuable insights into the intersection of organizational policies and gender dynamics, enriching the research findings with their specialized knowledge and perspectives.

The following table illustrates a brief overview of the selected interview partners. This information is intended to exhibit the diversity of the experts interviewed.

Country	Participant	Category	Yrs of Exp	Position	Industry	Duration
Greece	1g	1	1	Sales Team Leader	Beverage company	36min
Greece	2g	1	3	Premium Customer Relation Manager	Banking	22min
Greece	3g	2	1	Sales Team Leader	Beverage company	34min
Greece	4g	1	12	Agronomist Dev & Planning	Municipality	47min
Greece	5g	2/3	4.5	Senior HR Manager	Hospitality	56min
Greece	6g	2	10	Group Financial Controller	Snack Production	21min
Austria	1a	2	5	Sr. Consultant & Project Manager	Software	52min
Austria	2a	1	3	Talent Developer Manager	HR Services	40min
Austria	3a	1	1	Project Management Team Leader	Semiconductor	26min
Austria	4a	1	1	R&D Project Manager	Semiconductor	30min
Austria	5a	2	1	Digital Design Project Manager	Software	30min
Austria	6a	1/3	0.5	HR Team Leader	Semiconductor	45min

Figure 9 - Table of empirical research participants (own illustration)

4.4 Qualitative Content Analysis According to Philip Mayring

4.4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis involves the structured examination of communication materials, encompassing written, spoken, or visual content. Its primary objective is to scrutinize these materials using established guidelines and theoretical inquiries.

Key features of content analysis include its focus on communication, where content analysis deals with transmitting symbols used in communication. Furthermore, the utilization of recorded communication being analyzed is in some form of record or fixation, whether written, oral, visual, or other. Additionally, the systematic approach, which means a methodical and structured approach to gathering, categorizing, and analyzing the data, and the explicit rules applied to conduct the analysis contribute to ensuring the reproducibility of the results and allow other researchers to understand and verify the analysis. Also, a good content analysis is based on a theoretical foundation and examines the material in the context of a specific theoretical question. The results are then interpreted in light of the theoretical background. By conducting meticulous content analyses, researchers can discern patterns, themes, and trends within communication materials, offering valuable insights across disciplines such as communication studies, sociology, psychology, and media research (Mayring, 2015, pp. 11-13).

4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative analysis involves considering various criteria. A crucial factor is whether the analysis employs numerical concepts and mathematical operations. Using numerical elements falls under quantitative analysis; otherwise, it qualifies as qualitative analysis (Mayring, 2015, p. 15).

The domains of qualitative analysis can be delineated based on its historical applications. Notable areas include:

Deepening: Qualitative analysis validates the plausibility of interpreted correlations. It can supplement information that has fallen short and further investigate and confirm statistical correlations that have been identified.

Theory examination: Qualitative data can test hypotheses regarding specific developmental patterns, offering empirical validation for these theories.

Qualitative analysis aims for a comprehensive understanding of intricate phenomena. It surpasses data quantification, allowing nuanced exploration of contexts, interpretations, and individual perspectives. This methodology finds application across diverse academic fields like sociology, psychology, anthropology, and educational research (Mayring, 2015, pp. 22-25) .

4.4.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis offers distinct advantages rooted in communication studies. It emphasizes contextual interpretation and considers the material's origins and impacts. A systematic approach necessitates predefined rules tailored to the research inquiry and material. Content analysis is not a fixed process that always applies similarly; rather, it must be adapted to the concrete subject and material and tailored to the specific research question.

Categories are central to qualitative content analysis, which is the foundation for understanding and ensuring intersubjectivity. Researchers can compare results and ensure their reliability using categories, even though qualitative analysis can be flexible. There's a need to be extra careful about

quality, like being fair and reliable, especially when different people are conducting the analysis.

Identifying the source material marks a crucial step in content analysis involving assessing existing linguistic content. This step is often missed, similar to how historians study and critique sources. It includes:

1. Material determination: Clearly defining the material under analysis.

2. Production context analysis: Describing the circumstances and agents involved in producing the material.

3. Formal material characteristics: Specifying the material's form, typically as written or transcribed speech.

Once the source material is described, the focus shifts to determining specific interpretations. This necessitates posing targeted questions and establishing the direction of the analysis. Precision is honed through defining units of analysis:

- Coding unit: The smallest analyzable material portion, assignable to categories.

- Context unit: The most significant text portion relevant to a category.

- Evaluation unit: Identifying text parts for sequential evaluation.

Developing a category system is key, evolving alongside the theory and material. Categories are shaped and adjusted based on set rules during analysis. Finally, results are interpreted for the main research question, and their accuracy is checked using content analysis standards.

Three primary forms of interpretation are delineated: Summary, Explication, and Structuring. These methods are distinct and not necessarily sequential; the choice depends on the research question and material at hand.

- Summary: Aims to distill essential content from the material, creating a manageable representation.

- Explication: Seeks to elucidate and interpret specific text parts by referencing additional material.

- Structuring: Focuses on filtering specific aspects of the material or organizing it according to predetermined criteria.

In this instance, the summary analysis technique is employed. It involves defining the level of abstraction precisely and transforming the material using macro-operators, gradually increasing abstraction as needed.

Once the material is thoroughly described, and the content to be summarized is determined, units of analysis are established. These units are rewritten concisely, focusing solely on content and omitting non-content-bearing text components.

The next steps involve determining the abstraction level for the initial reduction and generalizing paraphrases accordingly. This process continues, combining related paraphrases and integrating them into the category system, until the desired level of reduction aligns with the material.

5   Results

This chapter organizes and illustrates the outcomes of the empirical study. The findings from all twelve interviews have been grouped into three main categories and two different countries.

5.1   Organisational Policies

5.1.1   Greece

In the category of policies organizations in Greece have regarding gender equality, the focus is on understanding how these policies are designed and implemented to create a balanced and inclusive workplace. The input from six different individuals highlights various strategies and initiatives being undertaken to promote gender equality across different types of organizations.

A common theme across the responses is the commitment to achieving balanced gender representation, especially in leadership roles. Organizations aim for specific gender quotas, such as a 50-50 gender ratio in management positions, and also ensure equal distribution of each gender in every department, mostly in male-dominated industries. These policies are not mandated by law but are initiated by companies. These initiatives can either be a written policy (Participants 1 and 2) in the organization or a general strategy that the organization follows (Participants 3 and 5). This effort to promote gender balance is evident in several companies actively working to advance women to higher positions through fair hiring and promotion practices.

Support for women in the workplace is another crucial aspect emphasized by the respondents. Many organizations offer flexible working arrangements (Participants 5 and 6), allowing them to transition into roles that accommodate reduced hours or flexible settings. Childcare benefits and allowances are also provided by some companies to support working mothers (Participants 3 and 5). Some companies have introduced specific policies such as paid leave for gynecological check-ups (Participant 2) and comprehensive maternity and

parental leave for both genders (Participants 5 and 6). These supportive measures are designed to create an instrumental environment for women to balance their professional and personal responsibilities effectively.

Compliance with Greek regulations is strictly maintained, ensuring that organizations adhere to legal requirements related to gender equality for all the participants. This includes adherence to policies on paid leave (Participant 2), anti-harassment, and fair treatment in the workplace (Participants 2,5 and 6). Larger companies often provide more extensive gender equality seminars and training sessions than smaller ones, where such initiatives might be less frequent (Participant 1, 4).

Anonymous reporting systems for discrimination and harassment are widely implemented to ensure a fair and respectful work environment. These systems allow employees to report issues without fear of retaliation, reinforcing the organization's commitment to maintaining a just workplace (Participants 2,5 and 6). Additionally, structured evaluation and feedback processes, often involving multiple levels within the organization, are in place to promote fairness and accountability (Participants 4, 5, and 6). These evaluations help recognize skills and commitment, supporting the advancement of women in leadership roles.

In general, some participants (Participants 2 and 4) came from organizations that strictly adhered to legal requirements, while others (Participants 1, 3, 5, and 6) worked in organizations that implemented additional initiatives beyond what was mandated by law.

5.1.2 Austria

In exploring gender equality policies within Austrian organizations, various individuals' insights highlight diverse approaches to fostering inclusivity and fairness in the workplace.

Participants 1 and 2 both underscored the absence of formal written policies in smaller companies, emphasizing a deeply ingrained commitment to

equal opportunity and recognizing the need for gender balance in leadership roles as companies expand. This reflects a cultural ethos where values drive decision-making more than formal guidelines. Participant 2 reinforced this perspective by noting the provision of equal rights in career development and flexible maternity leave options, regardless of gender. The emphasis on individual choice regarding maternity leave typifies a commitment to accommodating diverse needs and preferences among employees.

Support for women in the workplace is another crucial aspect emphasized by the respondents. Participant 4 highlighted efforts to promote gender balance in hiring and project management positions alongside initiatives like Women's Day campaigns and employee support during pregnancy and parenthood. This illustrates a proactive approach to addressing gender disparities and creating an environment where women feel valued and supported throughout their careers.

Participant 5 discussed rumoured policies for gender diversity in leadership and the benefits provided to women in Austria compared to other regions, highlighting extended paternity leave as a supportive measure. These policies reflect a broader societal recognition of the importance of supporting working parents and promoting gender equality professionally and personally.

Furthermore, compliance with regulations is a fundamental aspect in ensuring gender equality within Austrian organizations. Participant 3 mentioned adherence to legal requirements related to gender equality, such as policies on paid leave and anti-harassment measures. This indicates a commitment to upholding standards of fairness and equity mandated by law.

Lastly, Participant 6 mentioned initiatives such as comprehensive diversity training and anonymous reporting systems for discrimination and harassment, demonstrating a commitment to fostering a fair and respectful work environment. These proactive measures aim to address implicit biases and create avenues for addressing issues of discrimination and harassment transparently and equitably.

These insights collectively reflect the efforts undertaken by Austrian organizations to promote gender equality. Austrian participants conveyed that their organizations strive to deeply ingrain these values into their culture rather than merely creating policies to follow by the book.

5.2 Level of Awareness

5.2.1 Greece

In this category, the author assesses Greek employers' level of awareness and commitment to initiatives empowering women. The evaluations are based on interviews with professionals from various sectors, providing a detailed understanding of the current state and the reasons behind their assessments. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "minimal awareness and no commitment" and 10 means "extremely high awareness and unwavering commitment," the six Greek participants gave the answers below.
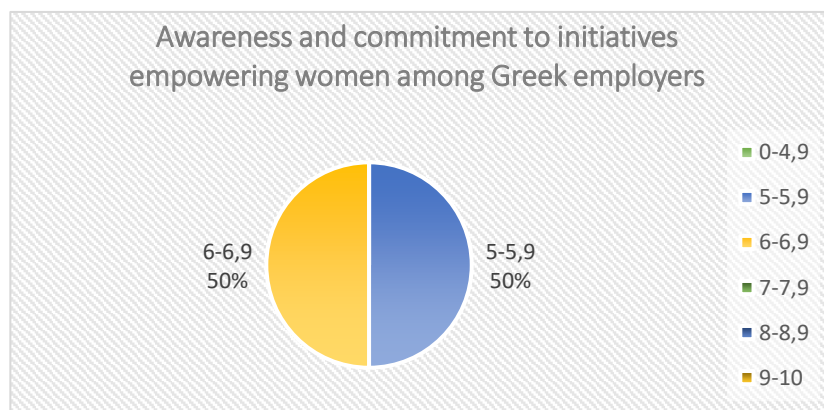
Figure 10 Level of awareness and commitment of Greek employers (own illustration)

The responses reveal a similar view of awareness and commitment to initiatives empowering women among Greek employers. All of them score the awareness and commitment of Greek employers somewhere close to the medium with an average of 5,5/10. Most of the respondents (Participants 1,2,3,5 and 6) pointed out that this stems from international companies being more involved in the Greek market. They have to adopt similar policies to be

competitive and keep up with the competition. Among small-medium local companies, it is a common mindset that women during their fertile period might get pregnant and have to pay for them without being there (Participants 1,2,4,5,6). Challenges persist in addressing biases against women, particularly those in reproductive age or without children, with a preference for men in leadership roles and traditional family roles hindering equal promotion opportunities. However, it is not the same case for older women when they are more settled and they have older children and so on, according to respondents (Participants 4 and 6). The public sector prioritizes meritocracy(Participant 4), while the private sector emphasizes financial gain, reflecting divergent criteria for career advancement (Participants 1,4,5 and 6).

Although improvements are gradually occurring, significant changes are still needed to convince employers that the Greek family dynamic has evolved (Participants 1,2,3,4,5 and 6). The pace of this change suggests that achieving true equality may take many years, not just to align with European standards but even to fully adhere to the Greek legislative framework (Participants 5 and 6).

5.2.2 Austria

Various participants' insights provide a more positive view of the level of awareness and commitment to gender equality among Austrian employers. The evaluations are based on interviews with professionals from various sectors, providing a detailed understanding of the current state and the reasons behind their assessments. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means "minimal awareness and no commitment" and 10 means "extremely high awareness and unwavering commitment," the six Austrian participants gave the answers below.
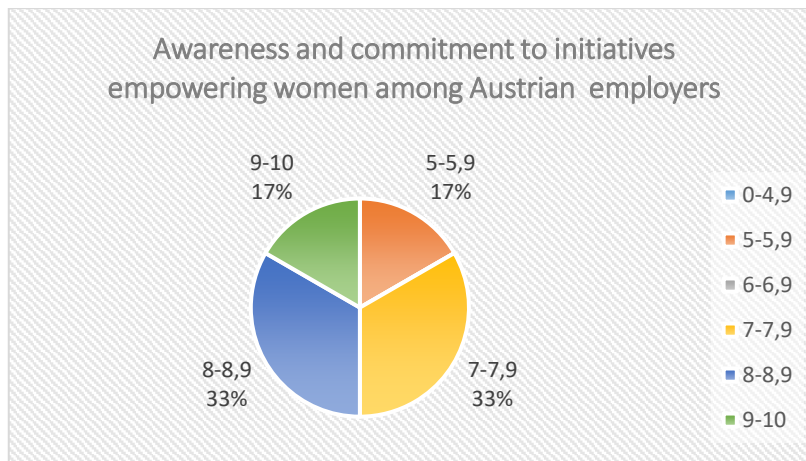
Figure 11 Level of awareness and commitment of Austrian employers (own illustration)

Participants 1 and 4 rated the level of awareness and commitment relatively high, around 7 to 8 and 8 to 9, respectively. They highlighted that most Austrian companies follow state-mandated maternity and educational leave rules. There has also been a concerted effort by many companies to attract a more diverse workforce, including offering in-house kindergarten facilities to support working mothers. Larger companies tend to provide more benefits and initiatives, while smaller startups focus on developing female leadership through career progression programs. However, certain industries struggle with gender diversity due to the pool of available candidates.

Participant 2 gave a lower rating of around 5, indicating that while some companies are highly regulated and adhere to collective agreements ensuring fairness, others rely more on cultural norms and performance-based pay. Flexibility, such as home office options and part-time work arrangements, is becoming more common, but smaller companies still face challenges in accommodating maternity leave due to their limited workforce.

Participant 3 emphasized a high level of awareness (close to 10) but expressed skepticism about companies' genuine commitment. They noted that focusing too much on gender diversity might lead to positive discrimination, and real change needs to start from early education and family environments. The disparity in childcare costs between Austria and other countries like Switzerland

was also mentioned, with Austria offering more supportive measures for working mothers.

Participants 5 and 6 also acknowledged a high level of awareness, around 7 to 8. They pointed out that while international and larger companies show high awareness and commitment, smaller local companies often lag due to traditional mindsets and less exposure to international influences. They noted that discriminatory practices still exist in some companies, particularly those with conservative leadership.

Overall, Austrian companies are highly aware of gender equality, but the degree of commitment varies significantly based on company size, industry, and cultural attitudes. Large and international companies tend to be more proactive in implementing gender equality policies, while smaller and more traditional companies face greater challenges. On average, Austrian employers score around 7.5 out of 10 in awareness and commitment, indicating a generally high level of engagement with gender equality issues.

5.3 Obstacles

5.3.1 Greece

Respondents mentioned that the most common obstacles women face when pursuing leadership positions are deeply rooted stereotypes and societal biases. Many respondents highlighted experiences of ageism and sexism, such as being told they are "too young" (Participants 1 and 3) or faced with imply about their competence and integrity (Participants 1, 3,4, 5, and 6). These biases often come from older men, reflecting deep-seated societal norms. Stereotypes persist, suggesting that women cannot handle leadership roles as effectively as men due to perceived emotions (Participants 4 and 5) or family commitments (Participants 1,2,3,4,5, and 6).

Another significant obstacle is the expectation of traditional family roles. Many respondents noted that women are often seen as primary caregivers, which

can hinder their career progression (Participants 1,2,3,4,5 and 6) . The assumption that women will prioritize family over work leads to biases in hiring and promotion practices. This is exacerbated by a lack of supportive structures, such as adequate childcare facilities (Participants 2 and 5) and flexible working conditions (Participants 2 and 5), which makes it difficult for women to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Furthermore, discriminatory practices during interviews, such as inquiries about marital status and family plans, were frequently mentioned (Participants 1,3,5 and 6). These practices reflect a broader societal issue where women's potential for maternity leave influences hiring decisions, perpetuating gender inequality in the workplace.

Structural issues within organizations also pose significant challenges. The need to relocate for promotions (Participant 2) and inadequate policies or training to prevent discriminatory practices during hiring further complicate women's career advancement (Participant 6). Additionally, the country's prolonged economic crisis has influenced companies' mindsets, affecting financial allocations and prioritization, which can hinder progress toward gender equality (Participant 5).

Societal stereotypes persist, suggesting men are more capable and suitable for leadership roles (Participant 5). This belief, rooted in Greece's patriarchal history, affects women's career opportunities (Participants 3 and 5). Also, the resistance of older ages in male-dominated industries was mentioned as a prevalent barrier (Participants 2, 3, and 4). Despite recent improvements and changing mindsets among younger generations, significant barriers remain. Practical challenges, such as managing overtime and the responsibility of raising children, also contribute to the difficulty women face in achieving leadership positions.

Furthermore, a notable difference exists in how the public and private sectors view career advancement. The public sector emphasizes meritocracy, while the private sector often prioritizes financial gain, which can disadvantage

women who are seen as potential liabilities due to family responsibilities (Participant 4).

5.3.2 Austria

Women face numerous barriers when pursuing leadership positions, influenced by deep-rooted stereotypes and societal norms. Persistent biases, such as the assumption that women prioritize family over career, pose significant challenges. For instance, companies often view women as a risk factor for long-term roles, fearing that they may take extended maternity leaves, which impacts their decision-making processes when considering women for critical positions (Participant 1). These stereotypes are particularly prevalent in male-dominated fields like IT, sales, and the automotive industry, where women often must outperform their male counterparts to be considered for leadership roles (Participant 2).

In Austria, the preference for work-life balance significantly affects women's career progression. Many women prefer part-time work to maintain a healthy balance, which limits their availability for high-demand leadership roles. This preference for part-time work is deeply ingrained in the culture, as many value fair pay and more personal time over high-powered jobs (Participant 1). Additionally, primary caregiving responsibilities and limited access to childcare, especially outside major cities like Vienna, hinder women's career advancement. Women often take on most family responsibilities, which can result in career interruptions and a reluctance from employers to promote them to leadership positions (Participants 2 and 4).

Organizational and cultural biases also play a crucial role. Companies may have inherent prejudices against women in leadership roles, influenced by societal norms and historical gender roles. Women often must prove themselves significantly more than men to achieve the same positions. This is compounded by the still prevalent sexist attitudes within the workforce, where men may view women as less capable or committed (Participant 5). Austria's traditional society

and gender norms perpetuate these biases, affecting women's opportunities for advancement (Participant 6).

The confidence gap and differences in negotiation styles between men and women contribute to disparities in career advancement. Studies show that men are generally more self-assured in applying for jobs where they don't meet all qualifications, while women are more cautious. This confidence gap can hinder women's career progression as they may hesitate to apply for roles unless they meet most of the criteria (Participant 2). Additionally, men tend to be more demanding in negotiations for pay and benefits, which can result in better career opportunities (Participant 2).

Positive discrimination policies, intended to support gender equality, can sometimes backfire, creating indirect challenges. For example, some managers disapprove of men taking parental leave, which can place additional pressure on women to balance work and family responsibilities (Participant 3). Job advertisements and company cultures that subtly discourage female applicants, through gender-biased language, further complicate women's career paths (Participant 6). The slow pace of cultural change in local companies, especially in traditional areas, adds to the complexity of achieving gender equality in leadership positions (Participant 6).

Women who do achieve high positions often have very supportive partners or managers or opt out of having families, highlighting the additional personal sacrifices required to break through these barriers (Participants 4 and 6). This situation underscores the multifaceted nature of the obstacles women face, from societal expectations and organizational practices to personal choices and cultural norms.

5.4   Glass Ceiling Phenomenon

5.4.1   Greece

In this category, the author evaluates the existence and impact of the glass ceiling on women's career progression through interviews with professionals from various sectors. These assessments provide a comprehensive understanding of the persistent challenges and the underlying reasons, highlighting the influence of stereotypes, societal biases, and structural issues within organizations.

Respondents highlighted that deeply rooted stereotypes and societal biases are significant obstacles women face when pursuing leadership positions. Many respondents mentioned that the glass ceiling persists due to outdated mentalities and stereotypes (Participants 2, 3, 5, and 6). Despite some progress, this is often reflected in the lower percentage of women in leadership roles (Participant 2).

Several respondents shared personal and secondhand experiences that illustrate these challenges. A respondent stated that, although they did not personally experience the glass ceiling due to their supportive company, friends have had to constantly prove their worth (Participant 1). Participant 3, described a female colleague in a male-dominated industry who struggled to progress due to gender biases, despite her qualifications and skills. Participant 6 recounted a case where a retiring director refused to collaborate with women, prompting structural changes in the organization to address such biases.

The role of personal limitations was also mentioned. Participant 4 argued that women sometimes impose limitations on themselves, influenced by temperament, life goals, and a reluctance to take risks. Furthermore, traditional family role expectations were noted as another significant obstacle. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 pointed out that societal expectations of women as primary caregivers hinder career progression, leading to biases in hiring and promotion practices. Participants 2 and 5 emphasized the lack of supportive structures, such

as adequate childcare facilities and flexible working conditions, making it challenging for women to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

Discriminatory practices during hiring were also cited(Participants 1, 3, 5, and 6) and mentioned that inquiries about marital status and family plans during interviews reflect broader societal issues, perpetuating gender inequality in the workplace. Finally, structural issues within organizations were discussed. Participant 5 noted that the prolonged economic crisis influenced companies' mindsets, affecting financial priorities and hindering progress toward gender equality.

5.4.2 Austria

Experiences with these barriers vary widely. Some women report hitting the glass ceiling, feeling that their advancement is blocked due to gender, while others have not encountered such obstacles. The gender pay gap is also complex, with its measurement depending on many variables such as company, industry, and country, making generalizations potentially misleading (Participant 1).

Career interruptions due to maternity leave and part-time work significantly impact women's career progression. Women often take time off or reduce their hours when having children, during which their male counterparts may continue advancing their careers and earning more, creating a significant earnings gap (Participant 2). Additionally, social and cultural connections play a crucial role in career advancement. Women with children may find it harder to connect with male colleagues with different interests, affecting networking opportunities and career progression. This barrier is not solely gender-related but also involves cultural aspects (Participant 3).

Promotion rates for women are generally slower compared to men. Statistics indicate that while women do receive promotions, they often take longer to achieve them (Participant 4). Personal experiences with gender-related barriers vary. Some individuals have not encountered these barriers directly, acknowledging their existence but attributing career progression challenges to

other factors such as culture, ethnicity, and age (Participants 5 and 6). Positive examples exist where organizations have many women in leadership roles, indicating that supportive environments can mitigate these barriers (Participant 6).

5.5 Solutions

5.5.1 Greece

In addressing the persistent issue of the glass ceiling, Greek participants offered insightful suggestions to foster a more inclusive society where women can thrive in various sectors. Key among these proposals was the call for supportive policies and resources to alleviate the burdens faced by working parents, particularly women. Participant 1 highlighted the need for extended school hours and caregiving possibilities within companies, stressing the importance of state support in facilitating a better work-life balance. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 2, who emphasized the necessity of policies ensuring equality in benefits and opportunities for women, thus enabling them to dedicate more time to their professional pursuits.

Moreover, participants underscored the pivotal role of education in overcoming the glass ceiling and effecting societal change. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 emphasized the importance of instilling gender equality values from a young age and promoting positive role models in various sectors. They advocated for changes in the educational system to provide equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their economic status or geographical location. For example, Participant 5 highlighted the disparities in educational opportunities between urban and rural areas, stressing the need for equitable access to education to level the playing field for all individuals.

Furthermore, participants discussed the need to challenge stereotypical perceptions and biases that perpetuate the glass ceiling. Participants 3 and 6 emphasized the role of education in opening minds and reducing societal barriers

based on gender stereotypes. They discussed the importance of upbringing and education in shaping societal attitudes, calling for initiatives to challenge and dismantle harmful stereotypes that hinder women's advancement.

Overall, the responses underscored the multifaceted approach required to address the glass ceiling and create a more inclusive society. By advocating for policy reforms, education initiatives, and societal shifts, participants emphasized the importance of collective efforts in overcoming barriers and empowering women to achieve their full potential in the workplace and beyond.

5.5.2 Austria

Women face numerous barriers when pursuing leadership positions, influenced by societal, cultural, and structural factors. In Austria, traditional industries like manufacturing are male-dominated, and there's a need for more investment in evolving industries like AI and software development to balance gender representation (Participant 1). From an early age, children should be raised without gender stereotypes, promoting equal opportunities and interests in diverse fields, including IT and creative industries. Role models and promoting gender equality in schools are crucial in breaking down these stereotypes (Participant 2).

Family dynamics also play a significant role. Encouraging paternity leave and promoting men who share caregiving responsibilities can help normalize the idea of both parents working and leading, shaping children's perceptions of gender roles (Participant 3). Education systems need to avoid reinforcing gender distinctions in job roles and should highlight women's contributions throughout history to inspire ambition and normalize female leadership (Participant 4).

Societal support structures, like accessible childcare and flexible work arrangements, are essential for women to balance career and family life without penalties. Companies should create environments where both men and women can take parental leave without career setbacks and should recognize the leadership skills gained through parenting (Participants 2, 3, 6). Additionally,

while gender equality policies and targets in companies are necessary to break the glass ceiling, they should be implemented thoughtfully to avoid promoting individuals solely to meet quotas rather than based on merit (Participants 5, 6).

Overall, a multifaceted approach involving changes in education, societal norms, company policies, and family support structures is required to overcome the barriers women face in attaining leadership positions.

6   Empirical Discussion

6.1   Organisational Policies

Greek organizations have implemented various strategies to promote gender equality, with a strong emphasis on balanced gender representation, particularly in leadership roles. Initiatives include specific gender quotas, flexible working arrangements, childcare benefits, and comprehensive maternity and parental leave policies written or not. Compliance with Greek regulations on gender equality, such as anti-harassment and fair treatment, is strictly maintained. Larger companies often provide gender equality seminars and training sessions. Anonymous reporting systems for discrimination and harassment are widely implemented to ensure a respectful work environment.

In Austria, there is a notable commitment to gender equality, although formal written policies are less common in smaller companies. Efforts to support women include flexible maternity leave options, initiatives to promote gender balance in hiring, and extended paternity leave. Compliance with legal requirements on gender equality, such as policies on paid leave and anti-harassment measures, is fundamental. Comprehensive diversity training and anonymous reporting systems for discrimination and harassment are also common. Cultural values often drive decision-making without formal guidelines, reflecting a deeply ingrained ethos of equal opportunity.

Both Greece and Austria strongly commit to gender equality, though the approaches differ. Greek organizations tend to have more formalized policies, while Austrian companies often rely on deeply ingrained cultural values. Both countries emphasize flexible working arrangements and compliance with legal requirements.

6.2   Level of Awareness

Awareness and commitment to gender equality among Greek employers are moderate, with an average rating of 5.5 out of 10. This is partly driven by the

influence of international companies in the Greek market. However, biases against women, especially those in reproductive age, remain prevalent, hindering equal promotion opportunities. The public sector prioritizes meritocracy, while the private sector emphasizes financial gain. Significant efforts, however, are still needed to align not only with European standards but also with the Greek legislative framework from smaller companies with higher resistance.

Austrian employers demonstrate a relatively high awareness and commitment to gender equality, with an average rating of around 7.5 out of 10. Larger companies and international organizations are more proactive in implementing gender equality policies. Smaller companies, however, often lag due to traditional mindsets. Efforts include in-house kindergarten facilities, flexible work arrangements, and career progression programs for female leadership. Cultural attitudes and company size significantly influence the degree of commitment to gender equality.

Austrian employers generally demonstrate a higher level of awareness and commitment to gender equality compared to their Greek counterparts. However, Austria's commitment degree varies significantly based on company size and industry.

6.3 Obstacles

Women in Greece face obstacles such as deeply rooted stereotypes, societal biases, and traditional family role expectations. Biases in hiring and promotion practices, lack of supportive structures like childcare facilities, and discrimination during interviews are common. Structural issues within organizations and the prolonged economic crisis also pose significant challenges. The resistance of older generations in male-dominated industries further exacerbates these obstacles.

On the other hand, in Austria, women encounter barriers related to societal norms, cultural biases, and the preference for work-life balance. Persistent stereotypes view women as prioritizing family over career, impacting

their career progression. Part-time work preferences, limited access to childcare, and primary caregiving responsibilities hinder women's advancement. Organizational biases and sexist attitudes within the workforce remain prevalent. The confidence gap and differences in negotiation styles between men and women also contribute to disparities in career advancement.

Women in both countries face similar obstacles, including societal biases, traditional family role expectations, and organizational prejudices. However, the specific cultural context and economic conditions influence the nature and extent of these challenges differently in each country.

6.4 Glass Ceiling Phenomenon

The glass ceiling in Greece is perpetuated by outdated mentalities, stereotypes, and societal biases. Women often have to prove their worth in male-dominated industries constantly. Personal limitations and traditional family role expectations further hinder career progression. Discriminatory practices during hiring and structural issues within organizations are significant challenges.

In Austria, experiences with the glass ceiling vary widely. Career interruptions due to maternity leave and part-time work significantly impact women's progression. Social and cultural connections play a crucial role in career advancement. Promotion rates for women are generally slower compared to men. Positive examples exist where organizations have many women in leadership roles, indicating that supportive environments can mitigate these barriers. However, traditional societal norms continue to affect women's opportunities for advancement.

The glass ceiling is a persistent issue in both Greece and Austria, with traditional mentalities and stereotypes playing a significant role. Career interruptions due to family responsibilities are a common barrier in both countries.

6.5 Solutions

Greek participants suggest supportive policies and resources to alleviate the burdens faced by working parents, particularly women. Key proposals include extended school hours, caregiving possibilities within companies, and state support for work-life balance. Education is emphasized as a crucial factor in overcoming the glass ceiling and promoting gender equality. Challenging stereotypical perceptions and biases through education and societal initiatives is also advocated.

Austria recommends a multifaceted approach to overcome barriers to women's leadership. Key proposals include investing in evolving industries, promoting gender equality from an early age, and encouraging paternity leave. Education systems should avoid reinforcing gender distinctions and highlight women's contributions throughout history. Societal support structures like accessible childcare and flexible work arrangements are essential. Thoughtful implementation of gender equality policies and targets in companies is necessary to avoid promoting individuals solely to meet quotas rather than based on merit.

Both countries recognize the importance of supportive policies, education, and societal shifts in addressing gender inequality. Greek participants emphasize the role of state support and education. In contrast, Austrian participants advocate for a multifaceted approach involving investment in evolving industries, paternity leave, and thoughtful implementation of gender equality policies.

7   Discussion

The empirical results reveal notable similarities and differences in organizational policies, the level of awareness, obstacles faced by women, the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon, and proposed solutions in Austria and Greece.

Both Austria and Greece are dedicated to fostering gender equality within organizational frameworks, which is evident through the implementation of policies and initiatives like gender quotas, flexible work arrangements, and adherence to legal mandates. Nonetheless, the execution of these policies and the prevailing cultural attitudes contribute to nuanced disparities in women's workplace experiences in each country. It's worth noting that the starting points for these initiatives differ between the two nations, influenced by factors such as cultural norms, the size of companies, industry dynamics, and available financial resources.

In assessing awareness and commitment to gender equality, there's a notable distinction between Greece and Austria. Participants from Greece reported a moderate score of 5.5, reflecting a medium awareness and commitment to gender equality initiatives. The Behavioral Theory and Situational Leadership models are particularly relevant here, as they stress the importance of adapting leadership styles to specific situations and contexts. Greece's economic struggles and traditional family dynamics necessitate adaptive leadership that can navigate and mitigate these unique barriers to women's advancement. In contrast, Austrian participants demonstrated a higher level of awareness and commitment, scoring around 7.5. This heightened awareness is reflected in the prevalence of transformational and servant leadership models, which emphasize follower development and the importance of supportive and ethical leadership.

From a cultural perspective, particularly Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides further insight into these differences. Austria's lower power

distance and higher individualism scores correlate with a higher level of gender equality awareness and commitment, fostering an environment where flexible work arrangements and gender quotas can thrive. On the other hand, Greece's higher power distance and collectivist culture reflect more traditional societal norms and gender roles, presenting additional hurdles for women in leadership.

In Greece, where the economy heavily relies on services such as tourism, minerals, and agriculture (Atlas, 2021) distinct challenges arise, particularly in light of its recent economic crisis. Despite strides forward, biases against women in leadership roles endure, further complicated by traditional family dynamics and constrained financial resources. Eurostat data for 2023 ranks Greece as the second poorest country in the EU (Eurostat, 2024) , highlighting a significant gap in available initiatives and policies aimed at combatting workplace discrimination and bolstering support for women in leadership positions.

Austria, on the other hand, boasts a diverse economy with a significant focus on services, machinery production, and the chemical sector. Notably, Austria serves as a top choice for international headquarters (INVESTinAUSTRIA, 2024) , leveraging its strategic location in Europe for business activities in Central and Eastern Europe and Western European markets. This economic stability likely contributes to the higher awareness and commitment to gender equality observed among Austrian participants.

Despite these differences, both countries grapple with similar issues surrounding gender biases and structural barriers in the workplace. These challenges include underrepresentation of women in leadership, unequal pay, and limited career advancement opportunities, compounded by cultural stereotypes and societal expectations like the "motherhood penalty." Structural barriers such as inflexible work arrangements, lack of mentorship programs, and insufficient work-life balance support hinder women's professional growth. These issues highlight the need for concerted efforts to promote gender equality and foster inclusive work environments.

The persistent glass ceiling in Austria and Greece hampers women's career progress due to stereotypes, societal biases, and organizational structures. Challenges like the "motherhood penalty" and cultural expectations impede women's advancement. While progress is evident, comprehensive solutions are needed to address systemic barriers and promote cultural shifts toward gender equality. Participants' insights highlight nuances: while some women may self-impose limitations, others believe capable women will eventually overcome the glass ceiling. This variance underscores the importance of tailored strategies that consider individual and cultural contexts.

Proposed solutions from Greek and Austrian participants align with social role theory and emphasize the need for societal and organizational changes. Greeks advocate for supportive policies like extended parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and state-backed initiatives to foster work-life balance. Education is highlighted for reshaping societal attitudes from a young age. Austrians emphasize investments in evolving industries and changes in education systems to promote equal opportunities. Both stress the importance of societal support structures, gender equality policies in companies, and a comprehensive approach involving education, societal norms, company policies, and family support to overcome barriers to women's leadership.

The findings from this comparative analysis of women's leadership barriers in Austria and Greece offer significant insights for policymakers, business leaders, educational institutions, and other stakeholders committed to advancing gender equality.

Policymakers in Austria and Greece can use this research to develop more tailored and effective gender equality initiatives. The study highlights the importance of creating flexible, context-specific policies that address women's unique cultural and economic challenges in each country.

Business leaders can leverage these findings to understand better the real barriers women face, even with existing gender equality policies. By identifying

obstacles such as societal biases, traditional family roles, and organizational prejudices, leaders can adjust their strategies to meet the actual needs of female employees. By aligning policies with the real experiences of women, business leaders can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that effectively attracts, retains, and promotes female talent into leadership roles.

Educational institutions can use these findings to bridge the gap between academic preparation and workplace realities regarding discrimination and cultural norms. By understanding women's career barriers, educators can better equip students to navigate these challenges. Integrating comprehensive gender equality education, promoting diverse role models, and encouraging critical discussions on societal norms will prepare students for professional environments. Collaborations with businesses to develop mentorship programs and career readiness workshops can further ensure that students transition smoothly into inclusive and equitable workplaces.

7.1 Research Questions

Q1: What EU policies and initiatives address gender equality in employment, and leadership representation and how are these policies implemented in corporate environments in Greece and Austria?

Research indicates that the EU is a global leader in gender equality, largely due to its strong legislation on equal treatment and comprehensive jurisprudence. The EU has also integrated gender perspectives into various policy areas and enacted specific laws to tackle particular inequalities. Over recent decades, this has led to substantial advancements in gender equality. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 sets forth EU goals that include closing gender gaps in the labor market, ensuring equal participation across different economic sectors, addressing the gender pay and pension gap, closing the gender care gap, achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics, and funding initiatives to promote gender equality within the EU.

Greek organizations often implement gender quotas, flexible working arrangements, and compliance with legal regulations to promote gender equality. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is impacted by financial constraints exacerbated by the recent economic crisis. The Greek employers' level of awareness and commitment is considered medium with international companies boosting the overall score.

On the other hand, in Austria, these policies are generally well-implemented, with companies expressing higher awareness than Greece. Larger firms and international companies lead in proactive measures, such as in-house childcare and career progression programs for women. However, some companies and traditional male-dominated sectors especially in the countryside face greater challenges due to conservative attitudes

Q2: What are the unique barriers hindering the effective implementation of women empowerment policies in Greece and Austria?

In Greece and Austria, several unique barriers hinder the effective implementation of women empowerment policies. In Greece, cultural attitudes and traditional gender roles significantly impede progress. There is a prevailing belief that women should prioritize family over career, leading to lower female participation in the workforce and fewer women in leadership roles. Additionally, economic instability and high unemployment rates exacerbate these issues, limiting opportunities for women and reducing the focus on gender equality initiatives.

While there is a high level of awareness about gender equality in Austria, commitment varies widely among employers. Smaller and more traditional companies often struggle to implement gender equality policies due to limited resources and conservative mindsets. Industries with a predominantly male workforce, such as tech and engineering, face challenges in attracting and retaining female talent. Moreover, there is a perception of positive

discrimination, where efforts to promote gender diversity might be seen as unfair advantages rather than necessary corrective measures.

Overall, both countries face a combination of cultural, economic, and industry-specific barriers that hinder the effective implementation of women empowerment policies.

Q3: How do women in Austria and Greece perceive and navigate the glass ceiling phenomenon?

Women in Austria and Greece perceive and navigate the glass ceiling phenomenon through a variety of strategies and experiences influenced by cultural, economic, and organizational factors.

In Greece, women's experiences with the glass ceiling vary, often influenced by the specific corporate culture of their employers. Some women, especially those in companies with a strong commitment to gender equality, report not experiencing the glass ceiling at all. These organizations may have frameworks that support women, including high representation of women in leadership positions. However, many women in Greece do acknowledge the presence of the glass ceiling, either through personal experiences or observations of their peers. These women often note that despite qualifications and abilities, they face significant barriers to advancement. These barriers are attributed to persistent stereotypes, outdated mindsets, and ineffective policies. For instance, women in traditionally male-dominated industries like automotive or roles involving physical labour may find it particularly challenging to progress. Some participants mentioned that women might also impose limitations on themselves, hesitating to pursue higher positions due to personal doubts or societal expectations about balancing work and family life. This self-imposed glass ceiling adds another layer of complexity to the issue. Despite these challenges, proactive measures are being taken within organizations to address and mitigate the glass ceiling.

Greek participants identified several solutions to the glass ceiling phenomenon, emphasizing the importance of a strong corporate culture and proactive measures. Companies committed to gender equality can reduce barriers by restructuring departments to ensure diversity and grooming progressive leaders. Addressing long-standing stereotypes and providing support systems, such as mentorship programs and flexible work arrangements, are crucial. Additionally, fostering a meritocratic environment focused on skills and qualifications and encouraging women to advocate for themselves helps overcome both external and self-imposed limitations.

In Austria, some women do not perceive a glass ceiling, especially in organizations with strong gender equality frameworks and high female representation in leadership roles. However, others acknowledge the presence of a glass ceiling, citing barriers such as persistent stereotypes, outdated mindsets, and the complexities of balancing work and family life. For many, career progression is hindered during maternity leave or part-time work, while their male counterparts advance, widening the career and pay gap. Workplace politics and cultural connections also play a role, with women often feeling less connected in male-dominated leadership environments. While some women report slower promotions compared to men, they recognize that career advancement is possible with time and effort. The overall perception is that while gender biases and barriers exist, proactive organizational strategies and cultural shifts are essential for navigating and overcoming the glass ceiling in Austria.

In Austria, there's a pressing need for investment in evolving industries like AI and software development, with the potential for a more balanced gender representation. While the country excels in tourism and manufacturing, these sectors remain male-dominated. By collaborating with educational institutions and promoting gender balance in creative, software, and digitalization-related fields, Austria can harness its full talent pool. Encouraging flexible work structures and recognizing the skills gained through parenting can also support gender

equality. Finally, fostering an environment where both men and women are equally supported in their family and professional roles is crucial for sustainable progress.

7.2 Limitations

The following limitations highlight the need for caution while interpreting and using the results of this study. While every attempt was made to assure rigor and validity, these limitations underscore the complexities of gender diversity and leadership dynamics within the framework of EU policies in the context of 'Unveiling Gendered Hurdles: A Comparative Analysis of Women's Leadership Barriers in Austria and Greece.

It should be noted that this work's empirical component is based on qualitative interviews; thus, unlike a quantitative study, no generalized results can be presented due to the small sample size.

Despite efforts to remain objective, prejudices and preconceived conceptions of the researchers may have affected the procedures for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data.

Furthermore, there is a risk that the respondents may have misinterpreted the questions and, consequently, made false statements. This danger is related to the possible influence of the interviewer on the respondents as well as the competence given to answer the questions.

Finally, it is essential to mention that the interviews were conducted relatively short; thus, the resulting findings could only represent a snapshot.

7.3 Further Research

Exploring further avenues within the scope of gendered hurdles in leadership roles could yield valuable insights for future research.

One promising area is to delve deeper into the intersectionality of gender with other socio-economic factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, particularly within the context of EU policies. Investigating how these

intersecting identities influence women's experiences and barriers to leadership positions could provide a more nuanced understanding of their challenges.

Additionally, long-term studies tracking the implementation and effectiveness of EU policies over time in different cultural and organizational contexts would offer valuable insights into the evolution of gender equality initiatives.

Furthermore, comparative analyses with other European countries or regions outside the EU could shed light on the transferability of strategies and best practices in overcoming gendered hurdles.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of women's leadership barriers in Austria and Greece within the framework of EU policies reveals both similarities and differences in the approaches taken by organizations, the level of awareness among employers, the obstacles faced by women, the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon, and proposed solutions.

Both Austria and Greece demonstrate a commitment to fostering gender equality within their organizational frameworks, albeit with differences in policy implementation driven by cultural norms, company size, industry dynamics, and economic conditions of each country. Greek organizations tend to have more formalized policies, reflecting an approach influenced by EU directives and transactional leadership models emphasizing structured changes and compliance. Austrian companies, however, often rely on deeply ingrained cultural values, aligning more with transformational and servant leadership models that focus on follower development and ethical leadership.

However, there's a notable disparity in the level of awareness and commitment to gender equality between Greece and Austria, with Austrian employers demonstrating a higher level of awareness and commitment on average.

The empirical findings underscore persistent challenges for women in both countries, including societal biases, traditional family role expectations, and organizational prejudices. The glass ceiling phenomenon remains a significant barrier to women's career advancement, perpetuated by stereotypes, societal biases, and structural issues within organizations. This is consistent with social role theory which explain how deeply entrenched gender roles and biases hinder women's progress.

Despite these challenges, Greek and Austrian participants propose multifaceted solutions to shatter the glass ceiling, emphasizing the importance of supportive policies, education, and societal shifts. These solutions highlight the

need for comprehensive approaches involving government intervention, corporate initiatives, and educational reforms.

Looking ahead, there is immense potential for both Austria and Greece to pave the way for a new era of gender equality in leadership. By embracing collaborative efforts and holistic strategies, both nations can transform workplaces into places of inclusivity and opportunity. This journey towards equality not only fulfills the aspirations of EU policies but also unlocks the boundless potential of a diverse and empowered workforce. Together, we can create a future where gender equality is not just an ideal but a vibrant reality, fostering leadership that truly reflects the rich diversity of our societies.

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10 Appendix

10.1 Interview Flow

Greet the participant and thank him/her for participating.

- Little small talk.

- Explain Master thesis topic - aim of the interview-define timeframe

- Ask for his/her consent to record

- Start recording

Category 1

1 What kind of EU gender equality policies has your organization implemented to align with EU?

2 How do you assess the level of awareness and commitment to women empowerment initiatives among Greek/Austrian employers? (also explain why you chose that rating). On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being 'minimal awareness and no commitment' and 10 being 'extremely high awareness and unwavering commitment,'

3 Has there ever been a case where your organization took action to protect a woman from gender discrimination or harassment in a hierarchical setting? Can you describe the incident and the measures taken?

4 What are the challenges companies face in implementing these policies and initiatives?

Category 2

5   In your opinion, what do you think are the obstacles preventing women from attaining leadership positions?

6   How do you envision the future of women's leadership in the country or your field, taking into account ongoing efforts to promote gender equality?

Category 3

Are you familiar with the term glass ceiling? Brief explanation:[..]

7   What is your experience regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon in your professional journey?

8   What factors, resources, or initiatives do you believe are necessary for society to overcome the glass ceiling phenomenon and encourage women's leadership in your country?

Closing

Do you want to add something?

Thank for participating

10.2 Transcription of interviews

Participant 1g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant : Yes, [company name] is fully aligned with EU directives. Basically in our company by 2025 they want 50% of the leading positions to be filled by women. And so that is very encouraging, and they are trying to do it gradually. We also have many examples of women who came back from pregnancy and got directly promoted. So they are very supportive in that respect and they are very much promoting the female gender, especially in managerial positions. Our manager is a woman and she has basically put women on her team. Yeah for trainings to be honest no, only on women's day they give us every year so speeches and stuff and we have an online meeting. Is usually arrange a meeting with the general manager (who is also a woman) to ask her some questions and so we discuss issues that may come up or that we have experienced in the past with gender racism. Returning from pregnancy is what is generally the case in Greece, that is you can either return with reduced hours or you can take the whole period together. In general, the legal rules apply, what applies in Greece, and what is provided by law. Yes, here in our factory in Thessaloniki, I don't think so, but in Athens there will definitely be something like that, because more

people are working in the offices. We mainly have one or 2 people in the whole building, so there are none. The gender paygap has been fully equalized. There is no such discrimination in the salary part in our company.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: I would put 5 and I would put it only because there are very large companies and multinationals operating in our country, like ours. Because otherwise and from discussions and from colleagues who may have left and looked for a job, -women colleagues- there is a lot of racism in Greece in terms of gender and age. Because they say "You're 30, you're going to have a child", it happened to a colleague who left the company and was not hired by another company because she was told directly "Nikoleta, you're 31 years old, next year you'll want to have a child! We won't hire you." She wanted to go to another, smaller company, so in general, I think we're quite behind in this topic and a lot of racism too. Okay, I think that slowly this is starting to eliminate in our own company. But we're still a minority. Consider that in Northern Greece (for [company name]) I was the only one until a month ago after my manager who is also a woman, there was no other female team leader. Women are more present in leading positions mainly in marketing, hr. In sales, it's a little bit more male-dominated.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: Hmm no. I don't have such an example to share.. To be honest generally in the company everyone is very cool with the racism thing. But I'm telling you because this is where we are, in Athens for example where is more competitive environment may have been something . That would also be rare and I think they would have done it if something came to their attention.

Interviewer:Question 4

Participant : I think they would not devote the time and money because the budget is limited. Not that they don't have an understanding of what the situation is and how much more difficult things can be for a woman and how to empower a woman to be able to give her the tools she needs to rise. It's not so much a matter of ignorance so to speak as it is a matter of not making a profit, so if they're going to invest somewhere they're going to invest somewhere else, that's the mindset.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: It's definitely the racism part that like "come on now girl, you're too young" and I've experienced that myself with clients. Yes of course, like "How old are you? The [company name] puts kids in high positions." From men, of course, and from slightly older men. Let's say a woman would be happy to say that they are giving young guys the opportunity and women, especially and blah blah blah and it's definitely stereotypical. And it definitely plays into the "Who knows now she's slept with someone." Luckily my manager is a woman. For the little girl I laugh and reply don't look at me like that I am older than I look but I have the experience and we can and will talk about it together. Okay, then I think you win his trust, but as a first impression it takes you by surprise. They have already asked me if I am definitely the one they are going to talk to. And I say, "No, I'm here to make fun of you. Haha Yes yes, you can experience gender- racism and within the group let's say from older people and men and women. I think it's the stereotypes that we have as a society. I think the older people have not overcome. The younger

ones because we have grown up a bit differently and with other experiences, I think that slowly it is starting to, let's say, diminish.It hast happened, to hear, "Come on, you're a little girl what do you know?" I may not have your experience I will tell her but I may have a fresher perspective and everyone has something to gain from it. And a part that makes it difficult for a woman to get a position of responsibility is family. Because they assume that if you have a family the child wants his/her mom. Dad is nowhere to be found, he can have his career doing whatever he wants, but you don't. You're the one keeping house. Well whether this is stereotypical or not, I will say it probably depends on the family and the partner you have chosen to have a family, but I won't hide it from you, I was like, I'm not going to have a child until I get the position, I will wait a little bit to grow in the position, because if I have a child, then I might not have the opportunity to take the step forward. And take into account, that I'm in a company that they're into the woman and the mother and still it's because of this mindset that we have been grown with.(I don't think in any way that there is any obstacle to the feminine nature of woman, that we are more sensitive, compassionate, and not so aggressive)Yes, it's purely stereotypical. I also think it's the family part I mentioned before because I've seen enough of that racist stuff going on.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant : Ideally, I wish all companies at some point, even the smallest ones, would understand how to manage people, whether they are men or women, and I wish that these stereotypes that I am describing to you that I hear from friends and that I have partly experienced myself would be eliminated and that we would go to practices that are good as in [company name]. Of course, this also requires empowerment from women themselves, because I think that we often do not want to work together, so to speak, and thus have a rivalry. I think it will be eliminated this discrimination thing, as I see in general that various stereotypes are being eliminated, whether it's about the LGBTG+ community, whether it's about "foreigners coming in and taking our jobs" and other things. I think we still have to work on that for sure another 15 years. I'll just say it just makes me happy to see that you see that action is being taken that action is being taken more or less. You know, and television plays its role and social media now plays a very important role and there is a more intense, so the promotion of the whole issue. But a 15 years what do we need to say that for sure let's say it will be significantly improved.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: Yeah, no, I wouldn't say that, but I'm telling you again because I'm in this company, which is really into women. I didn't feel it at all, I didn't experience it at all. On the contrary, I feel and more so let's say support because of this framework 50% women in positions of power and other benefits. I have not, I have not experienced it. However, I have examples in my friends who have certainly had a hard time getting into the job and moving up and having to constantly have to prove that you are indeed worthy.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant : Well, I think that certainly the state should be a little bit more helpful in terms of the family part, and the part of supporting young parents, whether that means extended hours in schools, for example. All-day school used to last until e.g. 4pm for working parents. Now they've widened it a bit but

for me that I work until 6 is still not helpful. Either with extended hours or it would be good if companies could create some caregiving possibilities for the children of employees to work inside the company. And then certainly campaigns maybe in. Yes, also group sessions that companies could do, for women to be able to manage such sensitive situations and they could be advised by a specialist psychologist/coach. Period, however, I would like to say that it would be equally important to have an information campaign. For example, so that I, the mother, know that I can use this and that and the one provided by the state. If people are not informed how the state benefits will be applied.

Participant 2g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Look, there are seminars addressing gender equality and various policies against inequality organised by [company name] like once per year. Regarding policies, there are reduced working hours in case of pregnancy or maternity, there is maternity leave what is stated by the government in genral. Also, there is a specific hotline, communication channels where you can report any incidents of discrimination/harassment, etc. Additionally, it could be considered, from this year there is a special leave for women, health leave for undergoing preventive gynecological examinations, which may also show the organization's intention to understand the needs of women. I would say those mandated by law. Also, there is this mandatory quota that must exist in the organization in managerial positions where there must be a specific percentage of women. And indeed, in the branches, in managerial positions, there is around 40-50%. I think it's a significant percentage of women, and in the Organizational Board of Directors of the Organization, the percentage of women is also quite high and has been increasing over the years, and I believe it's because of this European directive.

Interviewer: Have you encountered any difficulties in implementing all these policies that [company name] is trying to apply, both from your side and from your experience?

Participant : Possibly hindrances are the stereotypes of the past from certain colleagues, mainly older ones, since in the past, the bank was a male-dominated industry, there was a high percentage of men, meaning women were very few in the past, so possibly older colleagues show some resistance to this. There are, I would say, colleagues/managers who might sabotage, I would dare to say, such initiatives of the organization.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant : I think we are somewhere around 6-7, possibly. Given that in Greek society there are still social stereotypes of the past that classify women into specific professions, fields, or possibly to only deal with family and home, and in recent years, great efforts have been made to change all of this. And indeed, I think it has changed. So, in the last 20 years, and possibly more, this perspective may have changed and that of society that sees the position of women in the job market. It's gradually being eliminated to a significant extent. Globalization and the opening of the market also play a role in terms of employment. So, whether we want it or not, Greek society will have to adjust to European standards.

Interviewer: Question 3.

Participant : No, nothing related. I could mention that in some cases where I need to step out of the bank and meet specific clients without any specific unpleasant event occurring, in professions where it's primarily male-dominated, where they are accustomed to communicating more with men, so seeing a woman they need to cooperate with, their initial reaction might not be so encouraging.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant : Perhaps an obstacle is the reality of women as it is shaped today due to the specific schedule she may have available for work, given that her schedule is loaded with obligations either from the family or home, which, for better or worse, largely burden women rather than the male gender. Perhaps even women are not yet ready to fully adapt to this equality, given that it has not alleviated their schedule regarding their family obligations.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant : What I mentioned earlier, I think women's schedules may not allow them, let's say, a specific example. Personally, I should have left my job by three-thirty at the latest because I have to pick up my children, so whether I want it or not, I cannot have a more demanding schedule and be able to dedicate more time to work even if I want to. Whereas men have the convenience that their wives will take care of their children when they get sick; for me, I have to be absent from work compulsorily, while, for better or worse, even today women mainly take on this responsibility. A man has the convenience of not being absent from work so many days, having a more flexible schedule, and being able to dedicate more to his work. At this point, I should mention that it's not a coincidence that most of the female managers in the stores I know in the area are either single or married/divorced without children. I think it's not coincidental. Also, to become a manager, to climb up the ladder, you have to change bank branches, which means changing areas and most likely cities. I've been offered to become a manager, but as a mother with 3 children, I wouldn't definitely change cities but also, I depend geographically on my job because it's near my home, and the school bus almost waits for me under the house to pick up the children so until a point the structure of the organisation doesn't help me. Of course, there are responsibilities for creating this stereotype. Obviously, it started from somewhere, so maybe all these past policies that did not favor equality have left their mark. I think this cannot change from one day to the next, so the small changes that I believe have been happening in recent years, I think in the future we will reap all these benefits contributed by all these steps. So, surely the state can help with various policies and essentially unlock women from this workload either with some allowances or with other specific privileges that can be given.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant : I think there are good omens for a better future for women in the workplace, especially in higher hierarchical positions. It's already beginning to show, and I believe in the coming years it will improve, given that all these policies I mentioned will begin to yield results. All these efforts that have been made will change all these stereotypes and society's perception.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant : Surely, it exists, without having to cite a specific and glaring example. Nevertheless, even just the numbers regarding leadership positions, while the percentage of women has increased, it still remains lower than that of men, showing that this glass ceiling exists. Obviously, there are some obstacles either due to mentality, stereotypes from the past, or due to inadequate policies that have not been taken into account or have not yet produced results. I believe these obstacles will be overcome in the coming years. Simply, to overcome them, I think there should be policies that will help women to be able to dedicate more time and even if they want, to be able to take advantage of this equality given to them without real obstacles regarding benefits, children they have to take care of, or household chores. Policies need to be found to alleviate them from the daily burdens they face.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant : I believe education can play an important role, so from a young age, it has been instilled in everyone's consciousness that the role of women has changed both in society and in their professional field, and that girls and women can now pursue any position they want, and there are policies that encourage these actions and are tangible and can be relied upon. And from the state's side, there could possibly be policies that encourage female entrepreneurship and progression with financial resources.

Participant 3g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: The company advocates for equality in the workplace in any form possible, from implementing fair and transparent hiring and promotion procedures that provide equal opportunities for men and women, to promoting female participation in higher positions. So, it's an organization that strongly supports this. As a company, we strive to eliminate gender bias within professions, and I am saying this from personal experience because I expressed interest in a position in HR, and we had a discussion where they told me they were pleased to hear that. They wanted to have a nice mix in every department. In my department 3-5 years ago, the majority of the leader teams were men, but currently, we have a team of 6 leaders consisting of 3 men and 3 women. So, there has been a significant change in that aspect. Okay, there are some benefits, especially regarding incentives for new mothers. Overall, I haven't had anyone in my team utilize them, but I also know that the company provides incentives for new mothers regarding childcare centers, so it pays some extra benefits with allowances for children. It also provides an allowance with each birth as an increase, so I consider it to be very supportive of mothers regardless of their positions.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: Well, looking at the job market overall, taking examples at least from my own work circle and social environment, I'd say I'll rate it a 6. I wouldn't say we're in the middle; there have been some steps taken in recent years, mainly by large companies, such as the one I'm in. Large organizations that have European standards of a multinational corporation, and the good thing is that it trickles down

to the philosophy of small and medium-sized enterprises in Greece because they have to follow. I think very soon I'll be able to say we're close to a 7, and I hope this changes very quickly because indeed, steps have been taken very rapidly. If we were talking five years ago, I would say we were at a 3-4. What changed is that many companies from abroad came and invested in Greece, so all this transferred a working model towards the others, and this helped the mentality of employers change significantly. SMEs to be competitive, to be able to prove to their employees that they also have a very good environment. There have always been family and smaller businesses that adhered to all these and were in favor of equality and provided opportunities. However, primarily, this was not the case. Nevertheless, I am very happy to see that this has changed, so it's a hopeful message for the future.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: Fortunately, I don't have such an example to narrate to you. And I haven't heard of anything either. However, I'm sure that if such a thing happened, the organization would step in to defend. We see this very intensely, and I notice that now, in many positions and roles where there were never women, this company has chosen to have women because they truly deserved to be in those positions, proving that those were stereotypes all these years.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: The mentality adopted by mainly small and medium-sized enterprises continues to operate under that, as it believes it's correct, essentially, meaning the opening of horizons of a business, getting ideas, participating in various projects, meetings, and essentially broadening its knowledge and practices to become better. Unfortunately, in Greece, this doesn't always happen, so I believe that's a factor. Another factor is certainly the education behind this particular aspect, meaning we still encounter people in Greece who differentiate between men and women and categorize. It seems that it hasn't been eliminated yet, so initially, I would say education along with how much this society wants to change. I want to believe in young people who go out, study, and have stimuli. Also, the fact that many times a woman may be hired for a position because she might be young and single and be asked in the interview if she lives with someone if she's engaged, or anything, because they might fear that this girl might leave with maternity leave in a year, so they choose to ask this question to avoid hiring her. I have a close environment where this has been asked in almost, I would say, 60% of the interviews she had done, she has been asked about this, and I think it's a fixed situation and it happens quite often, unfortunately.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Stereotypes initially, definitely, as I said before, and I mean about the ability because there is a general suspicion for managerial positions that a woman cannot handle certain situations, like a man, and this might arise because she might have a family which affects her as she has to raise children at home. Another factor I believe that doesn't help a woman to progress is that there is also a mentality that after creating a family, a woman mainly focuses on the family. So, it puts work in second place, so she cannot cope as before, something I believe is not true. It purely depends on the person and how much they want to invest time and energy in their work. I have a quite difficult and challenging area. From the perspective of mentalities, there is a low level of education in many areas, there are some stereotypes,

so for a woman, the obstacles she will encounter are way more than men. Of course, from the beginning when I conducted interviews, I told HR that I wanted variety in my team, to have a nice balance, to have both men and women. I also told them about previous examples where girls had come on this specific route, and really, they might leave crying, wanting to leave the company because they might receive horrible behavior. All this I told the HR girl that I have no problem bringing a girl there, and I would like it as well to prove the opposite. But the person we want would have some specific characteristics, and I don't care if they are male or female. I believe that a girl who has certain characteristics, just like a boy who has the spark, could be calm, handle some situations, and so on, could equally cope properly. In the end, there was an internal move, and then I conducted the remaining interviews. Unfortunately, only one girl's profile was accepted for the position. In another case, I have taken a girl who when we hired her, we said she wouldn't last, let's say, we said that now she's going to give up, and yet, at this moment, I have to tell you that she has the best performance of all. She has handled the most difficult clients with the greatest calmness and maturity, and they respect her much more than anyone else who comes and challenges all this that exists why not promote that girl and support her to become a team leader. Speaking about patriarchal families and patriarchal businesses, historically, there haven't been many women in leadership positions. This started changing only a few years ago through some companies that imported work models from abroad, right?

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: Well, I believe that this will greatly improve very soon. It holds because many companies have made commitments to this cause in society and they will strive to follow them in the shake of their CSR and reputation.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: It's not just a term and it's not random, of course. I mean, as you explained it to me, it's like I can imagine it. So, if I think of a hypothetical scenario, unfortunately, I can easily picture it. However, despite that, I haven't encountered it. No, I can't say that I've encountered it, but through conversations I've had with friends, it definitely seems prevalent because the stereotype hasn't been broken yet. Especially in small to medium-sized businesses. I think it also has to do with the professions, meaning certain professions that involve more physical labor mainly have male employees. Also, in professions like sales in car parts or anything related. We have a person in our company who stands out. She's a woman who worked for years as a saleswoman in a company dealing with car parts and repairs. And she told me how difficult it was for her to immerse herself in that environment, even though she has all the skills. And how she couldn't progress in that area afterward just because of her gender. So, yes, she was very good at her job, but there was what you mentioned as the glass ceiling and that was the reason that came to [company name] because she wanted to pursue a higher position.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: Well, I generally believe that everything can change from the foundation, from education, I mean from childhood. For me, it means that everyone should understand the importance of equality from a very young age, whether in any sector, whether it's in the workplace or in the family

environment. Secondly, having more female role models in politics or entrepreneurship will play a significant role, so I believe they need to be brought to the forefront for society to accept it. Also, television and social media are ways that can help eliminate this, by promoting it, because now everyone is connected. And then, surely, by presenting good practices that some companies have behind this issue, I mean, for me, companies that operate with these standards should not only operate but also demonstrate it and show the value it offers. In short, to prove to the skeptics that you know what these are the facts, try it yourself, and you'll see that the stereotype you had in mind isn't true. That's how I generally see it.

Participant 4g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: The organization, being a public entity, is obliged to follow the legislation and policies applied in the country and the horizontal policies of the European Union. It doesn't implement anything particular, but there are no gender exclusion issues, perhaps due to the process that likely applies to the entire public entity. The process of selecting supervisors is a clear one, defined by the staff code and the code of sanctions for municipalities and communities, where it is clearly stated who can become a supervisor in each department. Selection is based on measurable criteria and does not involve interviews or other additional elements. Something that was taken into account in previous years, but now I'm not sure if it continues to be considered, is evaluation, as we are evaluated by our supervisors every year. In the organization where I work, due to its small size and provincial nature, there aren't many margins for exclusion. There might be a chance however even in the public sector, the supervisor who evaluates you decides with their rating whether to promote you or hold you back. Generally, I would like to reiterate that the size of the organization might be significant, as well as the extent of its administration by the mayor. Our organization consists of about 150-200 people in total. We're not a large entity, which means we don't have many activities of this kind, and therefore, we don't face evident problems. The gender balance within our organization is approximately equal, with about an equal number of men and women. I can't say that specific initiatives have been taken to promote equality, but on the other hand, there are no actions hindering a woman's progress. What I can say is, for example, in cases where there were vacancies, either because a managerial position became available and needed to be filled by decision of the mayor. Let's say the director or the supervisor who left retired, leaving such a vacancy. Usually, men were preferred. There was no evaluation process. Yes, it was purely the decision of the mayor, the one and only person. Sometimes it's also about the nature of the job, meaning there was a case where the position of the cleaning supervisor became vacant. This means that I needed someone to oversee the cleaning staff, the bins, and the garbage trucks. It was a bit more hands-on, dirtier work, where it might be considered okay that it was seen as men's work. On one hand, I don't know how satisfied a woman would be to be assigned to do this job. However, according to the law, let me be a bit more objective. The law states that if a position of responsibility, either a department or directorate, becomes vacant, it is

filled by someone from the same department, and if there were no women in that department, then the vacancy was filled by a man.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: I think we're somewhere in the middle. The fact that a woman has to manage a family, to be absent from work because she has children to take care of, not only on a practical level if she needs to be absent but also her mind might be preoccupied, and I think we haven't yet reached a level of equal opportunities. They prefer men to ensure smoother work. They may believe that they would encounter issues. Yes, I think they feel that work would flow more smoothly without delays or other problems if men were in charge. I consider that the traditional role still assigned to women within families is a reason why they are not promoted equally to men in positions of responsibility. I believe that if a woman has surpassed reproductive age, she's seen as a career woman, and then she might be treated more equally with a man. That is, they might only consider the formal qualifications, skills, availability, and all that, and a capable woman, but at an age where she still has a family, small children, and concepts that might distract her from work. Well, I think this is a negative factor for them. And, of course, we are always talking about the private sector because in the public sector, all these issues have been largely eliminated, but of course, in the public sector, we don't talk about financial gain, profit etc. There we have to do with more meritocratic, with different kinds of services provided to citizens. While in a private company, the future regarding one's existence criteria is completely different.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: I don't have direct experience in the workplace. No, we haven't, and I'm telling you why someone wouldn't dare to harass a woman in the workplace easily because we know each other very well. It's a very small community where we work. I think it's unlikely that someone would engage in such behavior.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: I think it's purely about how secure they feel that the person they choose for a position of responsibility will push them forward. How committed they can be to the subject matter. Because we always have a greater sensitivity to the family aspect, here in Greece. perhaps it's much more difficult for us to leave our baby with a nanny just to do things we want. Many times we look to finish our work and rush to attend to family obligations. What should be equally shared by a man isn't always. It has to do with the mindset of the country, which to a large extent, you see has started to change a bit in new couples. They've started to share things a little, but in terms of absolute sharing, it's still not there. Because when you hear that my husband helps me, and not that my husband and I do these things together, it means that it's my responsibility, and okay, he does me the favor of helping me, as long as this mindset isn't uprooted from within us, it won't change. I think even as women, unknowingly, we cultivate this mindset. Indeed, as women in Greece at least, we have many more responsibilities than a man in the same family.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: It's much harder for a woman to be accepted in a competitive environment. I think a woman has to try much harder. She has to try much harder because she is subjected to even greater scrutiny. She may have the same or even greater abilities than a man competing for a position, and it's not certain that she will be chosen because she's a woman, for all the reasons I explained earlier. What skills she posses, in other words, is not evaluated as her personality and presence; everyone has this in the back of their minds. It's not explicitly stated. Like, "Okay, she'll probably have a child or children. She'll need to take time off, they might get sick, and if I need her late at night, she might not be available." I think as long as these practical issues are not addressed by society, they will continue to exist. I think it's all the social burdens we carry within us without realizing it. Because we consider it our primary responsibility, and regarding children, we believe we know our children best, and all of this is because we've been raised this way. Regarding this, It's a matter of women's choice; it's not that they're excluded from education. They don't choose it themselves, perhaps because even the toys they give to children are completely different. It has to do with the entire social context, with what a little girl plays with versus what a little boy plays with. So, they have different stimuli and standards. Certainly, facilitating family life is essential. Even daycare centers, not just daycare centers but also places where you can have your child outside of school hours. How many such structures exist in the afternoons? To what extent do they exist? Some steps have been taken in recent years, but I don't think we've reached a desirable level, and it's also limited to a specific geographic area. Where perhaps there's greater pressure, bigger steps are being taken. But we still have a long way to go, and I don't know if we'll ever get there. I'm not very optimistic.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: I believe that a woman is much more capable than a man of leading because her mind works very differently from a man's. She can have and do much more simultaneously than a man; a woman can multitask, a man can't. Few men can engage in multiple tasks simultaneously. Their minds are more compartmentalized. I'm by no means questioning a woman's abilities; she may be much more capable of the same thing than a man. The demographic decline we're experiencing, I think, is a significant result of a woman's choice to pursue a career because she can't easily combine both. We need support from the state. Things are unlikely to change. I think it's a matter of mentality now, and gradually, this is changing, that a family consists of two leaders, not just one. It's a responsibility, a household, which must be shared equally to allow equal opportunities in employment and career. Slowly, it's starting to improve, but the issue is that until this changes and until the employer is convinced that the function of the Greek family has changed, I don't think this will happen in 10 years. That's what I think.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: It exists, but this glass ceiling is not imposed on women. Women impose limitations on themselves. If a woman doesn't decide that there's no reason to hold herself back, even though she has the qualifications and ability to move up, this won't be eliminated. That is, for example, she reaches a certain point and says, "Okay, I can't break the ceiling; well, I'm comfortable here." If this mindset doesn't change and, let me tell you, it has to do with ambitions and the character of each individual. I think this phenomenon is self-limitation. That is, yes, up to a point, I prove to myself and those around

me that I can, but beyond that, I think it will cause more problems than satisfaction.And this [lies in the nature of women, because let's say they don't want to take risks, because they are weaker, because they may prioritize family] isn't a general rule, you see, it has to do with each person's temperament, with the goals they have set for their life, with how they envision their life in 10 years, you know? What aspirations do they have? I think it's a matter that isn't imposed on you, but you accept it on your own. It's a matter of choices, purely a matter of choices.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: I'll go back to the aspect of family, how we raise our children from a very young age and how it contributes to their school path, to shaping all of this in creating dreams for themselves. And to dream about what they want to do, to think about how happy they would be, to have the opportunity to make a mistake and still can change if they end up being wrong. But all this, the freedom to see yourself in a few years, as. What do you think you will be? Will all this be okay? I think it needs to go through the family and school in the early years. I think there need to be parent schools, which people would be required to attend when they become parents. And it needs a different approach in schools. For the early grades, for elementary school, when a few pains start reactions and characters are formed. Overall, the issue is to be at a point that if someone is capable and wants to do it, they should be able to do it without being biased solely based on gender. A woman has to try much harder to convince because there are these social stereotypes that have boxed us in. These boxes need to be broken. I believe with the new generation among you, a mentality is beginning to change. It doesn't happen overnight. The responsibility a man feels for his home changes, and the woman has been absolved to leave her children to her husband for her work.

Participant 5g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Essentially, the most important thing is that in the last four years, we have a specific structure regarding evaluations, which are conducted from the supervisor to the subordinate, from the subordinate to the supervisor, and according to the grade of each employee, there is an additional process involving HR with respect to the employee. This was necessary because there was a predominantly male-dominated mindset, which has changed significantly in recent years. Many female colleagues now hold very high positions, such as General Managers of Hotels, Hotel Managers, and division heads. They have moved beyond holding primarily front office positions in our hotels. This change is due to the evaluation of performance, skills, knowledge, development, commitment, and goal orientation. Given the current workforce of approximately 5,000 employees, including seasonal staff, we follow specific policies regarding violence and crime, harassment policies, which are clear, and with the rebranding of the group, there are specific records for our mission, vision, and values. The entire management, board of directors, all GMs, were asked what is most important to them, what the company stands for, and the company's vision. These aspects have been documented, and we have made a significant investment as a group,

focusing on the early training of our staff and their smooth development, aiming to create a corporate culture that does not tolerate inequalities, negative comments, or discrimination. Unfortunately, we have not yet reached the point where there is a woman on the board of directors. There was a significant restructuring when one of the brothers [name] left, and now only Mr. [name] and Mr. [name] remain as the CEOs of the company. However, they are trying to delegate responsibilities to new people who manage finance, sales, marketing, HR, and so on. One level below them, many key positions are held by women, such as Marketing Director, Sales Director, HR Director. We don't have specific policies or guidelines requiring a certain percentage ratio to be maintained. Regarding mothers and leaves, we follow the legal provisions of each country, be it Greece, Portugal, or Spain, where we operate our hotels. There are always individual cases where the group has acted on personal initiatives, approved by the administration. For example, single-parent families facing severe financial difficulties received help to send their children to after-school care centers. Our hotel kids' clubs hosted the children of such employees. This is done on a case-by-case basis with the initiative of the respective GM. There was a mentality of not hiring a woman in her 30s because we needed to fill a position. This has changed as we move away from family-based operations to a corporate environment, driven by market necessity. Consequently, many young colleagues now have the option to work from home two days a week or choose a flexible schedule to spend more time with their families. Many new colleagues from Athens can now work from there without needing to be on-site at the hotels. The structure has become much more flexible because finding well-qualified colleagues to fill positions is more critical than the risk of losing an employee temporarily. This old mentality is changing, and while it still exists in many parts of Greece, it is not present in our group at all.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: This requires us to create some subcategories. Are we talking about large companies, multinationals, small, or medium-sized businesses? Overall, I would generously rate it a 6. This is because I think we are still somewhat behind, almost medieval, and it will take many years not just to Europeanize but even to adhere to the Greek legislative framework. We need to implement these frameworks instead of having the mindset of trying to cut costs wherever possible, like avoiding the expenses that come with maternity leave, etc. Unfortunately, as long as there isn't a strict enforcement mechanism that operates effectively and imposes fines during inspections, there will be leniency towards those who have this attitude. It's a sign of the times; a country that has been in crisis for so many years has ingrained in people the philosophy of squeezing out every last bit of value, which is very unfortunate. We are trying very hard to reverse this. For example, we had people coming in for recruitment and saying, "Give us your account number so we can return the Christmas or Easter bonus," because that was common practice in the market.Our group has always been 100% compliant with legal standards, whether it paid higher or lower wages is another discussion. But we are evolving and learning from the market as well.When new players enter the game, they push you to become a better version of yourself. So, yes, I think a 6 is fair, so as not to disregard those who are making efforts or complying after some recommendations or fines. The thing is, for example, IFRS sets some regulations that you need to check if you want to borrow from banks, and

there are many requirements you need to meet regarding green energy, recycling, and some of the topics we are discussing now. However, when we look at smaller companies, things change, although steps are being made. We should be grateful that efforts are being made, but we should also not be ungrateful for what we have achieved over the years to be in the position we are now. So, more or less, whether through tolerance, participation, action, or inaction, we have all been part of the same problem and cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility. Everyone, to some extent, contributes to this issue. Unfortunately, it's also about the fear of filing a complaint. For instance, a mother who is fired might think, "Where will I find a lawyer? How will I afford to file a complaint?" Making an official complaint to the employer who wronged her, knowing that the case might be heard after two years, requires a lot of money. The case could get postponed repeatedly, and eventually, she might receive reduced compensation years later, after incurring many expenses. Therefore, very few people pursue justice.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: The number one policy we have that directly addresses this question is our warning procedure. Each supervisor is responsible for monitoring their staff, not just in terms of job performance and task completion, but also in terms of communication. It is not permissible for anyone to shout or use abusive language. What I can tell you is that several times, individuals who were malicious or uneducated—using inappropriate language and aggressive behavior—were removed from their positions and promptly left the organization. This policy applies regardless of gender; it doesn't matter if the victim is a woman or a man. This behavior does not fit our company's culture. Respect is more than a given; it's essential. If you don't have it, you're not suitable for us. We thank you and move on to the next candidate. Our organization has demonstrated this by removing people from high positions who thought they were untouchable. We now experience a different environment. We have examples of sexual harassment, inappropriate language, and indecent photographs. In a group of 5,000 people, it's statistically likely that such incidents will occur.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: I believe that the larger the organization, the more difficult it is to implement something quickly. Initially, we spent a lot of time developing or inspiring a new procedure. Later, much more time was spent on seeing how it functions, addressing the mistakes and issues that arise. Solving these problems took a long time before reaching the final form and being fully adopted by all staff.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: I believe the biggest obstacles are societal. There's a pervasive belief that a man is always better than a woman, and in a Greece that experienced 400 years of enslavement, we have become an incredibly patriarchal society, more than we could have imagined. It's very common for a woman to do everything at home while the man works to bring in the money. I think younger generations are shedding this mentality, so we're moving towards better circumstances. I'm not talking about those born after 2000, but rather those born before 2000. The outlook for the post-2000 generation is uncertain and doesn't look promising. However, societal stereotypes persist that men are always more capable, dynamic, or suitable for any given role compared to women.If we trace it back, I believe it starts from the

family and limited representation. Many factors contribute to this mindset, like schoolbooks that show a boy playing on the cover instead of both a boy and a girl. In Parliament, the ratio of male to female representatives is about 1 to 5. We don't have a female leader of a political party, except for one who is considered crazy. This reflects a long-standing policy of the state and society. If we dissect it, there are many facets to what we consider good, what we have been taught to value, and what we should have been taught but weren't. Historical norms dictate that things should continue as they always have. Moreover, in the past two years, there has been an alarming rise in violence against women in Greece. A police officer might even tell you that a patrol car is not a taxi. The implications are extensive and profound. For instance, my sister's friend works part-time doing nails, but actually works 10 hours a day for a base salary of 600 euros with the rest paid under the table. When she got pregnant, her employer started a tirade about how she would be paid while on leave. This is a woman to woman issue, from one mother to another. We still follow the same outdated paths because of the pursuit of profit, societal pressure, or stereotypes. Anyone who deviates is considered an outcast or crazy. While this is more pronounced in rural Greece, even in major urban centers where we are evolving, there's still a lingering trace of these stereotypes. In the back of our minds, we may still harbor such thoughts.I belong to a generation that, upon completing academic education, had to have a bachelor's, a master's, know three foreign languages, and have 5-6 years of experience by age 20 just to get a job that paid 850 euros gross. We've endured such difficult circumstances that our values have been compromised. What is right and fair, what should be considered a given, has been distorted. This affects all aspects of our lives and how we act. If the younger generations don't bring about change, no one will do it for them. The system will remain flawed, regardless of who is in power. Unfortunately, Greece, with its rich history and culture, risks becoming the Bali of Europe—a beautiful holiday destination where Greeks will serve tourists because it's unaffordable for locals to vacation here. If we don't take action, we'll be deserving of our fate. Change can happen gradually if individuals take initiative. But it's challenging to accept our mistakes and act differently before realizing we are wrong.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: There are many women in very high positions in IT, sales, and other fields, which shows that it's not an unreasonable idea. It's actually paradoxical that this wasn't considered normal for so long. So, I view this very positively. I truly enjoy working with women; I have a great time.On a broader scale, I think we're moving towards much better times in this area. It will take a while to completely eradicate the issue, but steps have been taken forward. There's visible improvement, but it remains a societal stereotype. We don't yet provide equal opportunities to men and women. This will take more time to change in Greece. I believe these are just social stereotypes. I don't think there are many jobs, aside from those requiring significant physical strength, like chopping wood in a forest, where women can't perform as effectively as men. The key point is how you perceive it. From my perspective, it's clear: there shouldn't be any distinction or separation. Ideally, there never should have been, but okay. I'm talking about how, in every craft, in every technical job, some part of society shows an inclination towards it. Just as I mentioned earlier, women are generally stronger in communication than men. Similarly, a

woman might be more capable in marketing or human resources management than a man. For example, we know that people from Kenya have greater endurance than Greeks, which is a natural advantage. Similarly, women might have a higher pain tolerance than men. I believe that everyone should be fortunate enough to discover what they truly want to do in life. We might not always be the best at it, but at least it makes us happy. Acceptance is the challenging part. It would be considered discrimination if you had the physical strength to chop wood but were told you couldn't because you're a woman. The education system in Greece never taught us how to make a proper career choice. We never learned what HR means, what a civil engineer does, what an electrical engineer does, or what it means to be a doctor. These were all general concepts, and each person was guided by their social environment.

Interviewer: Yes, I agree. Do you think the corporate environment is more supportive of such issues in other countries compared to Greece?

Participant: Yes, unfortunately. In every aspect, from onboarding, training, raises, management, and the value placed on employees. I saw an article recently about 14 countries in the European Union, ranking which countries have employees working the most hours beyond their scheduled time. Greece was at the top, and Ireland was at the bottom with a rate of 0.2%.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: It definitely exists, but it's something that, if anyone still considers it, I believe it's maintained by some old-fashioned mindsets. However, it's not communicated or expressed openly. Even if it exists, people who adhere to it are so few and far between, whether male or female, that I think there's also a fear of openly admitting it. Still, there are things that, since we're always talking about values, people, and how much everyone works on themselves, you might have old-fashioned principles, but working on yourself can help you evolve into something better. For instance, we have an example of a GM we want to promote, but we can't because she has children and doesn't want to leave them. Imagine, we want to promote her, but it isn't possible due to her family circumstances and status. It will eventually happen, but adjustments need to be made, such as changing her base so she can spend more days in Chalkidiki where she lives, and so on.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: For me, the educational system is the key factor that will bring about the most significant and pivotal change. However, the value we place on this educational system is crucial because we, as Greeks, have come to disregard it. For years, we have claimed it serves no purpose, that there are no teachers, and we end up spending €5000 a year on private tutoring for our children. If we don't provide private lessons, it means we're not helping our children achieve their degrees in the future. There's a continuous decline in academic education, which is sterile and lacks feedback. There are many jobs, like electricians, plumbers, builders, that are in demand, but there are no qualified people to fill these roles. The same goes for the hospitality industry. I believe this stems from a lack of information and inadequate educational opportunities, especially in rural areas. A child living in a village in Giannitsa, for example, has far fewer opportunities than a child living in the city. This means that a child in the village is at a disadvantage in terms of opportunities. Similarly, a child from a different economic status will have a

greater chance to attend a private school, which opens up more opportunities abroad compared to a public school student. This might be a more personal observation rather than an objective one. Overall, I believe in education, a change in mentality, and travel. Travel as much as possible, see new things, experience different cultures, philosophies, and environments. We need to stop being paralyzed by fear. We tend to see something that scares us and immediately think we can't overcome it just because we're told it's insurmountable.

Participant 6g

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Out of the 5 departments, we have female Directors in 3 of them. The company's policy is that we want even the staff, the workforce, to be balanced, so we want to have the fifty-fifty rule applies in every level. And we definitely want the 30% at least. The fifty-fifty rule applies both to juniors and managers, so we try based on what is available in terms of market levels to have the fifty-fifty rule in each department, it just so happens that in 3 out of the 5 departments the directors are women. Yes, there is, based on legislation, so practically maternity leave is as per legislation for women. Now there is parental leave for men based on legislation, so we comply with that. The extra benefit we give is because when a woman returns, initially she will have reduced working hours, so we provide the possibility if she wants to do, let's say, a rotation in the company, meaning if she wants to take another position which she considers she can be more efficient in within the reduced hours, we give women this extra benefit. There is a possibility if the directors agree with them that they can apply somewhere, and it is more appropriate with the flexible, reduced hours, then the rest can take that position. For example, we do not have a corresponding policy for men. I, as a controller, cannot go to sales, but still, if I had reduced hours for such reasons, I could request it Yes, it happened recently that a woman returned from maternity leave and got promoted, we had a case, it was Irene. She was in production, and since she requested it, we implemented the rotation, in the first month she applied, we saw that she had good knowledge of English, knew about computers, and so on, and she became the Personal Assistant to the director. And it was no problem because the director needed someone until 3 pm, so it fit with all this.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: I think something in between, because usually, most businesspeople in key positions will not promote women. However, they would be more positive about hiring a professional woman who is ready. For example, if they had a woman in her 30s, they would find it harder to place her in a managerial position than if she were 40 years old, had her children, and so on, and was more ready. So perhaps in key positions, they do not prefer women. I think it's somewhat balanced. In our company, it's the opposite because most of the directors are women and thus they give a boost.

Interviewer: For the first ones you mentioned, what do you think is the cause of the problem? Is it that they place responsibility on women who might leave in 3-4 years for maternity leave, or do you think they don't consider them capable?

Participant: Yes, mainly that. Mainly it's because they believe that in key positions, you need to be committed for projects that require long-term relationships with the management, so they can't afford it. They would more easily hire a woman who already has children than one who doesn't.

Interviewer: Okay, so you rate it somewhere around a 5 because there are both types of employers. How do you think this has evolved over the past few years?

Participant: Yes, I think it's balanced. It has certainly evolved. We are much further ahead than we were, also because many companies have been acquired by international brands, so they have had to implement the parent company's policies. Whether they wanted to or not, they couldn't escape from this policy, so they necessarily start to harmonize with this climate. I think those who have been doing this for some years, at least five years, see that there is no difference. I think it's a matter of perception.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: Certainly, in production, we have many issues with sexual harassment. So in production, to be fair to everyone, because there are many positions and stages, when we say in production, it's not just being a worker at the machine, It can be a Master Baker, which also has levels. So we implemented 360-degree evaluations, meaning now there can also be upward evaluations. The company step in to defend her, HR created a system for anonymous complaints, which it received and, where it deemed necessary, discussed with the CEO. From there, we decided to implement 360-degree evaluations. In the upper level no, because for us, the directors are women, so we never had an issue.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: The challenges are wanting to implement such a policy through HR. The biggest challenge, I think, for Greek companies is to implement a work regulation. It is not the case for example, if you exclude companies with alliances, for instance, we are a group with a presence in America, so we have some influences from there. If there is no influence from abroad, it's a bit difficult to find a company with a structured work regulation that addresses gender discrimination, but not just gender, in general. The challenge is implementation. The company is 17 years old and only did it for the first time in January 2024, just now. It's definitely a matter of education for leaders and directors. For example, a typical director now is around 55-65 years old, so they have a certain mindset. To change this typical mindset, extra training is needed. So the challenge is for business owners to agree to educate themselves and their staff.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Certainly, one of the obstacles is this stereotypical perception. Considering that companies in Greece are small to medium-sized and often family-owned, they believe that they don't need work regulations, procedures, and so on for these matters. Additionally, here in Greece, we don't have a structured hiring process. For instance, our HR department has banned questions like "Do you have children?" and "When do you plan to have children?" They've banned requiring photos in resumes. We post job ads and strictly say "no photos," so that's something. I believe the whole personnel recruitment process is flawed. The way the process is structured, it's very easy for a woman to be exposed, I think. We try to eliminate this. We've had complaints about body shaming, so we decided that there will be no

photos in the interview process. We almost don't ask for age, although we do ask for age, but I think that's the whole issue. Certainly, a practical obstacle is overtime. When a woman has the responsibility of raising children and additional responsibilities at home, overtime becomes an issue. We try to solve this with remote work, which are some defensive measures that managers take. So I think most of the issues are practical, like presence and project involvement. For example, auditors might think that a woman won't be able to commit 100% at any given moment when it's needed. That's a key reason. That's why if a woman isn't hired for a leadership position due to her current family situation, it's difficult for her to be promoted. I think it's very difficult for women to get promoted. They might get a leadership position, but it will either be one-off or they won't get it at all. I think that's the concept. There are also sexist reasons, like we've had many complaints about sexual harassment. So I suppose that in the production lines, the supervisor will obviously be someone who either will give in or react less to sexual harassment. So that's definitely another reason. Let's say that when an anonymous complaint is initially made and then becomes named, if the complainant wishes. If someone sexually harasses you and you tolerate it or don't report it, obviously, you will be treated more favorably. So sexism is also a reason. It can prevent a promotion or result in not getting it.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: I think we'll start to see more women in leadership positions. Greece is following a trend, and since these new regulations are now in vogue, there will be a rapid pace. But I think after three or four years, the progress will slow down. However, I think it's somewhat a matter of trends.

Interviewer: Great, do you have any work experience abroad? Yes, basically, the question aims to understand if you believe the corporate environment is more supportive in such matters compared to other countries.

Participant: Definitely, because if we look at the control teams, the Mixed ones we collaborated with, the rates were higher for women than in our own teams. That is, we were under the same brand, but the control team was very different. For example, it could be 60-40 (female to male) for them, and for us, it might be 30-70.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: I think it clearly exists regarding stereotypes, mainly because, for example, I'm thinking of a plan director who has been around for years, is retiring, and had refused to collaborate with women. So, for instance, his peer directors had a problem, and he had a problem. In this case, we try to change the structure. We let him stay until retirement, but in any case, we wouldn't hire someone with the same perceptions, or the team that would take over would be clear from the start that it would be mixed. So, I think that stereotypes and the lack of education are the main factors for the phenomenon you described. They opposed him and just changed the structure. We split his department into two and placed a manager under him who is practically being trained to take over as plant director upon his retirement. So practically, the manager deals with those issues. He deals with those he wants.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: The factors to blame are certainly the stereotypical perception, and the solution is clearly education. Because I think it's the only way to open our minds a bit. I think we are quite close-minded on this matter. We say, for example, that children definitely need their mother; they need both mother and father. That's why single-parent families are considered vulnerable groups. So it's a combination of these two things: inversely proportional, as education increases, stereotypical perception decreases. It's not just education, it's also upbringing. It's first upbringing, then education. Education can train someone specifically in a company and tell them that they must work with a female director, and they'll just accept it because it's a work regulation. That's how they trained and proved it. The issue with upbringing is to be able to perceive the whole beyond just the role.

Participant 1a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Most of the companies I've worked for in recent years have been relatively small, typically ranging from 5 to 50 employees. Due to their size, formal written policies or strict guidelines regarding gender equality weren't prevalent. However, fostering an environment of equal opportunity was fixed in the corporate culture, regardless of gender or any other identity. For instance, at [company name], where I started with just three people and later expanded to 80 employees across multiple locations including [location], we experienced rapid growth in both staff and business units. As the company evolved, the founding team, consisting of three male members, recognized the need for gender balance in leadership positions as we established structures and hierarchies to manage growth. During a significant hiring phase, we actively sought out qualified female candidates for leadership roles to achieve a 50-50 distribution of decision-makers. While this policy was more implicit than explicitly documented, it guided our recruitment efforts and contributed to a balanced male-female ratio in the workforce.In previous companies, we often had more female employees than male colleagues, reflecting a commitment to diversity. However, in my current role, which is highly technical and centered around software development with a development hub in Poland, female candidates are less common. Despite efforts to attract more female talent, the industry's gender imbalance presents challenges in achieving gender parity in our workforce.It wasn't like a fixed quota of female candidates, but they were highly preferred if they were found. I mean it's a little difficult because since I worked in, let's say different industries over the past few years, you could see that in some industries you had much better opportunities to hire female employees than in others. Also, it depends on the geographical location. So now my current job we have the hub in Poland, and I would say Poland is a very traditional country. And since we were only looking or primarily looking for software engineers and software developers so for hard coding and not a lot of creative work like graphics design and stuff like this, there were merely zero female candidates that would fit to any position that we were trying to fill. For example, in the company that I was the Chief Operating Officer we had more female colleagues than we had male colleagues, and it was also in the, let's say digital industry, but more on the pharmaceutical market and the pharmaceutical market, especially because our clients were pharmacies primarily. Pharmacies, for example, are strongly female-dominated. Personally, I never have been in touch with such quality policies directed let's say from the government. I think again since most of the companies that I worked in were either startups or very small sized companies, there was not a need to have specific guidelines or procedures implemented because in very flat hierarchical companies you are more living up to your your values. Because the bigger

the company is, the more structures and hierarchies they have. Then you really need these guidelines and these procedures and these incentives and benefits. The mentality is very equal or equal oriented and because you don't have these long decision-making processes and these complex structures that you need to follow or these procedures, you can act much faster, more efficiently and more freely, I would say, and this was, I think, one of the main driving factors that we didn't have these guidelines, but still we had a very equal amount of people working in the workspace.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: The set of rules mandated by the state, such as maternity leave, educational leave options, and other benefits unique to women, are well-known standards that apply equally to all employers. These regulations are widely understood, utilized, and adhered to by everyone, as they are considered normal practice. Personally, I haven't encountered a situation where my female colleagues felt undervalued, unequal, or demanded additional benefits or rights because they perceived unfair treatment. In Austria, most companies operate in a way that ensures fairness and equality. However, there are certain industries where there's a desire for more female colleagues, but they can be challenging to find. Conversely, there are industries where female colleagues outnumber male colleagues significantly. Ultimately, the presence of female colleagues can vary depending on the industry. OK. I would rate it around a solid 7 to 8, mainly because many companies are making concerted efforts to attract a more diverse workforce, including more female colleagues. For instance, several companies now offer in-house kindergarten facilities to support working mothers, allowing them to balance work and childcare responsibilities. This trend is relatively recent; around five years ago, it wasn't as common for companies to provide such services. I recall one company from my bachelor's degree days, about a decade ago, that was well-regarded for its corporate kindergarten. Reflecting on my past employers, I've noticed that most of them now offer similar kindergarten services. This proactive approach by companies demonstrates a commitment to supporting women, mothers, and families in general, and signifies an increase in the incentives they provide. From my perspective, this movement toward greater support for work-life balance and family needs is becoming more standardized across companies, as they aim to enhance their reputation, attract a broader workforce, and foster a positive work environment.And especially for smaller companies, for startups, it's really hard to come up with benefits because, you know, as a startup or a small company liquidity and cash is really important. So you invest in the company's growth. So in terms of smaller companies, what they often say is these leadership programs where they're trying to develop female colleagues into leading positions. So they say, OK, if you start in the startup, let's say accounting or marketing or project management and you work for one or two years in project management, then we'll make your team leads or department heads. So to incentivize their employees, yeah, to come to the company and stay in the company and then you know grow with the company.And these bigger companies already have quite some assets that can be used, these companies can invest in kindergarten as we said before, and other benefits.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: I'm thinking but. I never had that situation, let's say like this where we had a case of active discrimination and steps needed to be taken.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: It's a quite a tricky question because obviously these topics became quite popular in the last few years and you started talking about these topics as well with your female colleagues in the workplace, right? And from my experience, what I've seen is that there is even between female colleagues, there's a great divide between them. I had some colleagues who are really pushing for this quota (50/50) in companies. But you said, OK, you have to have an equal amount of the leading position, male and female. And already back then, the opinions were split between my female colleagues and also

a couple of years later at the workplace. These opinions were split among my female colleagues because most of them or let's say like this, the colleagues who were not against but who were just not interested in the topic or females that said OK, you know I want to work but I also want to have a family and I don't want to spend most of my time in the job. I want to be there for my family, for my kids. I want to take care of you know, everybody around me. And so they were OK. I they said they don't care about female quotas. As long as they get a fair amount of pay. As long as they have the same benefits, they're fine with it, right? And then you also on the other side, you had female colleagues that were really pushing to say, OK, we need 50/50 distribution in everything. I think these diversity incentives, they have to be regarded on an industry basis, they have to be regarded on a company-size basis. And obviously also on a national basis, because I believe that's in especially in countries like Austria or the Scandinavian countries, there are many great benefits. And then when you look overseas United States or Canada? Then you have much less benefits and incentives, right? So it for on this on this side, it really makes sense to push directives to push, you know, new regulations and new standards. But if you have already, let's say a saturated industry or saturated market, then it's really the question if you need to be stricter on these guidelines and need to be stricter on implementations or not.I mean, so the challenges are as as you pointed out greatly it's it's the industry. For example, let's stick to my current industry, the software development industry. You as a company, you can implement guidelines and you can implement directions that you want to promote. More diversity, more inclusion and equal chances and equal opportunities, right? But as a company you cannot influence how many people are really going to study that field, right? You cannot as a company influence or push people to start Go to university and Start learning software development.This is something that it's still up to the young people, the young generation and their freedom of choice. And if, if you know out of 100 people 80 or let's say if still the majority of people who decide to go to learn software development are guys, then all these and you only have a pool of male candidates, right? All your guidelines and programmes and benefits. Won't help you to find or to fill your company with an equal amount of of people. The same goes if we look at the health industry that I had touch points with since we were working with the pharmacies and hospitals there you see that the majority of people working there. In pharmacies are female, so these natural sciences or these care industries are female dominated, right? How can your policies of a company push more male people to study this field and go into that field and work in that field. So in my opinion it's not only up to a company to implement these guidelines and these processes and procedures, but it it's a process that starts much earlier. With the education or the general awareness, and then by this you also then have to accept, you know, if the general preference of people is OK. As a guy, I'm really interested in numbers and engineering and mechatronics or whatever and this is what I'm going to study and the majority of the woman says, OK, I want to go into, I don't know, something more creative or project management or accounting. And you have this, these preferences that are already shown in the in the direction of education. Then you also have to acknowledge, OK, you know, maybe from my industry I cannot be as strict in implementing these guidelines.

Was the general preference is just on the other side right?

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Absolutely, that's an interesting question. One significant obstacle lies in the persistent stereotypes and societal norms that are deeply rooted. These stereotypes, like the assumption that females will prioritize starting a family at some point, continue to pose challenges. While there has been progress in this area in recent years, from a company's perspective, it remains a risk factor that must be factored into decision-making processes. For example, If you're trying to fill a position that is strongly related to Customer relationship management And you say, OK, I have a female colleague and she will be responsible for that client over a long period of time. You also have to take into consideration that there

might come point right that she won't be available because you know she want have kids and you know then for a certain amount of time at least she's out of the company And Most I think a lot of companies that don't act, everybody knows it or has it in the back of the mind, but most of them don't calculate with this meaning that Then what if this case happens? They're surprised in a negative way. We had this once, we hired a female colleague as a project manager. She was really good at what she was doing and because she was good, she got more projects, more responsibilities, more things to do. And after a couple of years, she became pregnant. And then she said OK, she's going on maternity leave, right? Two years before that, nobody were thinking about the possibility that she might get pregnant. And so, you know, she got a lot more work, a lot of more projects, a lot of more responsibilities. And when that case came everybody was panicking. And I think this situation happens or is quite common, but is not negative because if you actively take it into consideration, you can find you know solutions and I think this is one of the also another challenge may be that we already have quite some standards implemented for empowerments and equal rights. This means that a lot of the companies or leading positions, they don't actively think about these standards, and so when it comes, everybody's surprised. So I think that the second challenge is this awareness, let's say like this, this active awareness because as I said, we have quite some good standards but being aware of these let's say risk factors is still important and another obstacle, of course, is especially in Austria, where we have a very high part-time employment rate is to find actual candidates. I think also in the demographics of Austria you see that our population is getting older and older and older, but we're not getting many more younger people. So, generally speaking, it's hard to find employees. And since it is already hard to find people because every company's fighting over the candidates, it's even harder to find female colleagues or candidates that you can put in into your company to put in your positions. As we talked about, also, depends on the industry you're in. So I think we have some awareness obstacles. We have some industry obstacles. And yeah, also, these cliches that we need to battle. And I think there is already quite some work done because also you mentioned that yes startups, they cannot create all these additional services. But for example, what a lot of startups are doing, is having these female empowerment programs where we are trying to promote awareness for women empowerment.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: You know, I'm not totally sure if we'll see all the big changes we hope for. Personally, I feel like Austria's still pretty traditional. A lot of women want to work, but they don't want to be stuck working crazy hours, you know, like 80-hour weeks. They don't want to give up everything else in their life just for their job. And this whole idea of work-life balance is a big deal. Especially here in Austria, where lots of people prefer part-time hours. They'd rather work 25 or 30 hours a week and have more time off to enjoy life. So, instead of chasing after fancy titles or high-powered jobs, folks just want fair pay and more time for themselves. They want to chill out, do their hobbies, and hang with friends and family. And honestly, I think this matters more to how things are shaping up in the job market and society than all the talk about gender equality and politics. It's about finding a balance between work and life that makes sense for us.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: Yeah. Again, I had some female colleagues who said they really felt the glass ceiling and they hit the glass ceiling. But then again, you know I had female colleagues, who said the opposite. I think, especially in this direction, this might be now a bit controversial for you, but we had this discussion quite so many times also about the gender pay gap and I think there are also like two sides looking at the gender pay gap and I believe that this generalization of Gender pay gap and the glass ceiling is quite dangerous. Everything that we hear regarding these topics is not necessarily true because also the way you calculate the gender pay gap or the way how you measure the glass ceiling. Are so complex and so depending on so many different factors that you cannot say, OK, we measured it in one company and now

we can apply it to all the other companies or we compared it in, this industry or in this country and now we can apply it to everything else. And I think this generalisation is very misleading and also in one point and it's I think that there needs to be much more conversation done in this regard because just out of an economic factor, right? Because now when you look at Europe and we look at Asia, we see that a lot of industries are moving to Asia because of Cost reduction. But then again, if we say OK. A female employee earns 70% for the same amount of work she does as a male employee. Right then as a company. And if you are a company owner or a leading position in a company, you have to have this kind of efficiency in in mind, right? Then personally I would only hire female people because then I save 30% of the cost, right? But this is not the case because I think this generalization about the terms in terms of Gender Pay gap and glass ceiling is not as accurate as portrayed sometimes. It's again also when it comes to companies and being an employee, regardless of if you're male or female. There is always a lot of politics involved in each company. […]

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: Regarding the glass ceiling in general, I think we need a strong change in the overall mentality of the Austrian work style, I would say. A couple of days ago, I just read a statement about the CEO of one of the leading companies in Europe. He said that compared to the United States or Northern America, Europe is overregulated, underfunded and the people are demotivated to work, meaning we have a lot of regulations, there is not much buying power there anymore, which demotivates the people to work. And in terms of the glass ceiling? I think especially in Austria, what we need to do is we need to invest much more into evolving industries. Austria is tourism based, is manufacturing based like hardware manufacturing and these trends regarding AI and software development, they are still very, very small. And especially in industries where you have a much higher rate of female employees, these industries still can do a lot of development in Austria in my opinion, we have all these manufacturing industries like steel manufacturing, machinery manufacturing. These are heavily male dominated, right? So of course you can implement guidelines and rules and incentives to attract a greater female workforce in these companies. But then, as you said or as we said before, we also need to start in cooperation with education, or other organisations to promote these kind of industries for the female workforce. But I think the the industries that have the greatest potential for a very equally balanced Employment Like Creative Industries, software industries, and everything that has to do with digitalization and is related to this new arising industry that have been enabled by the latest technological advancements, these need to be developed and we need to incentivize and deregulate the market. […]

Participant 2a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Mmmm. OK.Well. We didn't t have a quote but of course there were equal rights when it comes to career development, for example. Also, when it comes to employee career plans, something like that. Maternity leave, yeah, everybody could choose which type of maternity leave would take. Also something in Austria which is called "Bildungskarenz" , I don't know if you know that term which means you can leave for a couple of months up to one year and it's because you want to study something, you know so you have to study something or do some kind of qualification, you also have to get in touch with the Employment Agency for that. I was one example of choosing to do that after taking the maternity leave. So if they wanted to do another year, for example, they would choose this kind of thing, yeah which is basically something from the Austrian Government and yeah, but normally it won't allow that or let them do that. Yeah and of course they have protection, the legal thing when you are on

maternity leave and then when you come back to the company you worked for because you have special protection. The system with the educational leave is offered from the government but the company has to allow that or has to give their consent because they can say no, we don't want you to do that now. No employee asked for that and couldn't do that and some women used this kind of offer or system when the maternity leave ended to have another year at home with the children. I mean, of course, they had to do some studies or some qualification, but they did that in some kind of online course whatsoever, so that it would fit. We have this range, so you have certain professions or jobs like people who work in recruiting and people who work in sales and so ever and within this profession, you say, OK, is this some person refered as a junior so somebody who has no experience at all or just a few years or is it somebody who's very experienced, It's kind of senior and has five or more years experience. Then you have this range and you say OK, a senior has to have pay within this kind of range and that depends on how much qualification the person has and how much experience a person has. And then also of course, if the person is in the company for let's say a few months or a year or longer. Then there's also of course the performance which counts. Yeah, but it's always within this range and it's it doesn't matter which gender you have.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: I would say in general it's the middle or it ranges 5, but it's just a feeling. Because I think you have some companies who are very regulated to rules or policies which is the company I'm working in now for example. They have very specific rules which are mandatory for them because of the collective agreement they have. Then I think you have companies like [company name] which say OK, we don't want to make a difference between gender, it only comes down to qualifications and experience and performance but no specific policies it's the culture. Meaning performance is one of the most important factor when it comes to pay. And then I think you have also a lot of companies who say, OK who can negotiate best when in the recruiting process, for example. And I think there are a lot of studies on that topic. And I also think it's feeling that in general, men might be a bit better negotiating than women. Yeah. But it's also, it's just a feeling. Do you think when a woman wants to become a leader, or when she's in a leading position and maybe has a lot of male colleagues? Well, in general, I can't say that there was no issue at [company name] because there were more female leaders than male ones. In general, I think it depends maybe on the branch you're working in or the niche. For example, I think there are male-dominated fields, you know, like in IT for example also in Sales or in some kind of branches when it comes to, I don't know the car industry maybe or whatsoever, and I think in this male-dominated fields I can sense it, it might be more difficult for a woman to get in a leading position that she has to, for example, have better performance or, yeah, do everything better than male colleagues would be. Yeah. But I think I think it comes down to that because in a field where there are more women, I wouldn't say it's easier, but yeah, maybe kind of easier to get in a leadership position. And sometimes when you go to a conference and you have a keynote speaker, there were women who said that it was the case for them, but I mean, of course it's just one woman who says that and I don't know that many more so that I can say, OK, that's really statistically proven, you know.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: No I can think of something like that. We didn't have any harassment at all, no matter if it was male or female. And the company I'm working for right now is also very, very strict on that. And they even have folders on the wall yeah, which are quite big and say that they do not tolerate that.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: There are a lot of studies on that and I think that's true that in general men are maybe more self-confident compared to women. Yeah. And when it comes to job ad, you see, there are studies on that that men say, OK, if I fulfil two of the five things they want to have, I will apply and we'll see. Yeah.

And women tend to think, OK, I only fulfil two or three, this job isn't right for me. Yeah. So I think that it starts there but always talks in general. But then I also mentioned negotiation. I think that, yeah, men might be, I don't want to say better, but they're more demanding maybe. This comes down when it negotiates in a package they get, in the pay or maybe other benefits, they negotiate. And of course, if you have children It's also more difficult I think because first you have a short gap, I mean, you have at least four months where you are not allowed to work in Austria unless you're self-employed. As a woman, if you're pregnant, and if you will have a child then normally the mother takes the maternity leave and even if they split and she and her husband split the maternity leave, It's always a problem when it comes to children's daycare, you know.And I think not only for the women but also for the men, for example, if they both work part-time that's more difficult to get in a leading position because a lot of companies don't want that or they say, OK, it has to be at least 30 hours or whatever. So one of the two of the parents often has to take a step back, and it's often the woman. Yeah, and often that's the case because they pay or the salary is not as high as the men. And of course, if you do the math, yeah, and you say, OK, we as a family, we can have this kind of money. If the woman works full time, but she maybe has a less salary yeah, or the man goes and works full time, he has a higher salary. Well, yeah, you normally choose the package where you have to higher salary as a family then. And it's also kind of difficult in Austria to get this daycare when the child is only one year old. It's better if the child is two or three years old, but one years old, that's OK in Vienna but it's very, very difficult when it comes to the other parts of Austria. I think it's a combination of many factors also of I wouldn't say parenting style, but the way a person is raised up and because normally it starts with that, I think it's different now. Nowadays when you look at the little children in kindergarten, also in elementary school, but 30 or 40 years ago, I think parents then made a difference and it was more likely in Austria that the girls were taught that they have to be nice and, you know, do the chores or be good at school and the boys the same but yeah, it was always said in. OK, but he's a boy. Yeah, he tried, but he's a boy, you know. There is support of the government because they support and finance the kindergarten and with kindergarten I mean also day care from one year on, and it's very, I mean in comparison, it's very good in Vienna because It's hard to get a place, but it's manageable. But it's very difficult in the other parts of Austria, I noted from colleagues because it's very expensive and we're talking about 400 or €500 a month per child and that's only until noon normally.[..] But then it's also a problem and I also experienced that if you work part-time and if you have certain kind of jobs like being in HR for example or being in sales or in project management or whatsoever, it's hard to define which kind of work can you do in, let's say, 30 hours? You know, so normally my feeling is you tend to get more work because also the company doesn't know what can you do in 30 hours? Yeah. And you always work more. Yeah. And if it would work full time, you would at least get paid. I think that in this certain kind of jobs it works in other kind of jobs not. For example, when you work as a policeman or woman because you have your shift and there could be 30 hours and then you can do more hours and you get paid for that. Yeah. But it's more clear you are here for 30 hours for example, and you do your shift and then it's over.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: I think it's getting better and better at least in Vienna, childcare is getting better. Also when it comes to schools my children, for example, they go to school where they have school until 3:30, and that's the standard. And then you can have an extra daycare if you need, you know but they're doing things to facilitate that. Also, companies are more open to Home Office and also working in the evening, for example. And I also think that it's more common that you as a woman, you split with your partner so that maybe both work part-time. Yeah. because if men demand more companies have to react. When I think of me and I think of my friends and family and so on, and also when I have a look at school, other parents at school try to bring up the children and say, OK you, you have equal rights. Yeah, no matter

which gender you have you can choose your profession. You want to do your hobbies so that, don't know, girls play football and boys play with toys or whatsoever. Yeah, I think people are more open to that. And of course then it's always a personality type of thing because, I was never interested in it, for example, and I still not. I'm still not interested in it. Yeah. So of course it has to do something with personality and with your talents and your interests, yeah. And I don't think it's the right way to say, OK, you are a girl, do something in IT if you don't want to. Yeah. I think in general people are more open to it. They say, OK, you have whatever choice you want to have, you can do. Stereotypes are not that not so cliche anymore, you know. I think now it's 80 or 90% male dominated in the IT fields, some kind of like that. I don't think that we will have 50-50 because I don't think that there's so much interest, but I think we won't have 80 or 90%, maybe 60 percent, 40-60 for example. And yeah, I think the role models are quite important because role models are important for every topic. Actually when you think of models who wear dresses something like that in the 80s or 90s, it was always very skinny women and girls and women wanted to be like them and now you have every kind of model you have tall ones and shorter ones. Every size, every hair colour whatsoever. And I think that's great.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: Yeah, I think that there is sometimes there is some kind of barrier and I can't name what it actually is, yeah. I think it's maybe a combination of when, I think of my friends. Yeah. and my bubble, actually, living in. Yeah. It may be the fact that nearly all of them got one child and then they got a second child and between child one and child two they work part-time and then they stayed working part-time because during this time when between getting first pregnant and having the first child and second child and the second child goes to kindergarten during this time in my field or in my my friends the male once did a career step and then of course, not not, of course but then they earned more money than they did before. So often they earn more money, a little more money, or maybe they were equal with their female partner. But during the few years she was maternity leave and worked part time, they did a career step and then they get sometimes a lot of more money. And then we have the thing again, OK is she going to work full time? And is he cutting down working part time? But then you have less family income than you could have. And yeah, so I think that's one thing.and I don't know if there are other things, I think that's specific to the company, if they, I think that there, I hope not and I hope if so there are just a few companies, but I think there are still companies to think, OK, that's a woman, she's a about 25 and she's getting pregnant in a few years. We don't want her to give a leading position. For example, yeah. Or maybe she's 30 we assume that she's getting pregnant soon. We don't want that. We stick with the male one now. I mean I hope not. But I think there's still a few out there. I don't think so or things like that.I mean at [company name] this wasn't an issue and they have women in leading positions also in head of positions. And one of them, I know she got pregnant twice, she was at maternity, for like six months, I think. But I know that the company was a bit struggling not with the fact that she got pregnant because they were happy for her but they thought, OK, she wants to come back in six months and it's great. Yeah, but what do we do? It is 6 or 8 months because the level of so they always had that. They always had to face challenge with that. Yeah. How, who can do the work for her. They were happy for her and it was great and she came back and she took the same role in. Yeah. So that was never an issue. But I think that maybe in general small companies may be struggle a bit more because they do not have so many employees where they can, you know, choose who will do the work for a certain kind of time or how can we split up the work, stuff like that.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: I think first it starts with the upbringing, which is a lot better than 30 or 40 years ago. To tell OK, you have equal opportunities then it is which kind of fields do I choose for my work? Do I go in field like, I don't know, being a nurse where I get get paid less maybe then being in the IT department or

in sales. Yeah. So, but that's every person's choice. And then, of course, it's the pay gap because If men and women would pay would get paid equal for the jobs. If they do the same job.Then you have less of the situation. I I talk about who stays at home with the children who works part time. Maybe both would work part time. And of course there has to be daycare. And so on. And I think that companies have to recognise that bringing up children is I mean, you learn a lot of leadership there and I can say that because I had leadership positions, people didn't have the children and I know what's more exhausting and you also have to adapt your leadership styles to your children. If you call it leadership style or parenting style or whatever, and it's the same with leadership. And I think companies have to acknowledge that more that you bring a lot of in when you have children and when you do the family mention it's not always negative issues like OK, what do you do when your child gets sick and so on. And it's also not a factor. The mindset of companies. I think it's a lot better than a few years ago and for at least 20 years ago. But also having the mindset often get 2 parents who take care of the children. It's not only the woman, so also if I hire a male employee, he also, I don't know. It's. Yeah. The sick leave days and and stuff like that. In summary, It's a mindset, I think the companies or the leading people in companies who make decisions. It's also about infrastructure, which comes from the state, like have enough daycare places from an early stage on and stuff like that. Also, the companies not only the mindset, but the structure you offer for male and female workers like doing Home Office, working in the evening as being flexible, yeah. And do that for both general for all genders, yeah. And then of course you have to, I don't know if changing is the right term, but men also have to, yeah, be brave and say, OK, I want to take, I want to work part time, I want to take father's leave and stuff like that, because if they do that in general there's no difference for companies to hire male or female worker.

Participant 3a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: So at [company name] we have certain KPIs for diverse team and it's not only about gender, it's mostly about different nations' diversity. So it's taken to account for the strategy of the company that you have to have certain amount of diverse people also, when you go to the organisation you see how is your team organised, how many nations you have and yeah actually it's important to have innovative ideas, but it doesn't mean that it's a must. I wouldn't say that there are written extra benefits or written extra rules about what the mother will have more than what Father has. So It's the same rights. It happened to me that depending on the manager but there is no extra rules from HR that women will benefits and compared to men the same also in the opposite direction. It's not like men has a little more rules. Yeah, right. I think that the company applies what is stated by the law, so. Yeah. I have never seen any extra. I came back from maternity leave I haven't changed my contract so I have the same contracts the same hours before maternity and after maternity. You can change it, but I decided not to change it. I sticked to the same timing. I work, yeah.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: Yeah, let me think about it. As I mentioned earlier, we have KPIs for diversity and when some high management speaks about diversity they actually mean gender, but in reality it should not be like that. So being a woman in the leading position, I do not like it that they put so much focus on gender as a diversity and they also link it to a certain amount of higher-level employees female gender because then there might be some misconception that it's much easier to be promoted being a female. And I don't feel it, you know, so I disagree with that. Yeah. And I also don't like when they put so much focus on female, equal rights, and everything. If you are equal and if it's true, you don't speak about it and

is there the place to change? or you have that you should have done it earlier in the families, in the universities and in the schools. And now it's too late. It's sounds a bit abnatural and not very honest. And I would call it positive discrimination sometimes. Yeah. Towards men.

Interviewer: So you think that the diversity title is misleading because they don't really focus on gender equality, but more in like national equality? If I'm OK and in general not only in [company name], but like in, in friends or in relatives that you know about working in other companies, how do you think is perceived? Is it the same as you said for example, Austrian employers acknowledge that women are discriminated against when they want to pursue a leading position.

Participant: Umm so I used to live in Switzerland and there, I would say the human rights are even worse, and it starts from the cost of childcare. So how much does it cost to bring to school your child to Austria, and how much does it cost to bring your child to kindergarten in Switzerland? And if you have 2 kids in Switzerland, it will cost you above 5000 and the average salary in Switzerland will be 6000 EUR 5000. So actually for women in Switzerland is not advantageous at all to go to work. If you have two kids. So compared to Switzerland, Austria is better. Compared to other countries there are some improvements possible, yeah. And for example, I guess Carinthian government has realized it and two or three years ago they implemented some subsidy for the Childcare cost for kids from 1 to 3. So I guess the reduced price by 30%. So they realize that this problem comes from the family. Yes, if the woman can bring the child to kindergarten, then the woman will go to work and then the message to the kid will be transmitted in another way. Instead, if you have a woman who is staying at home, then the child learn from mother and realises it. But still in Carinthia, not in all Austrian. Carinthia says that women stay at home taking care of kids or majority of women do a part-time contract and you can see by the after school activities for kids. I have a daughter 4 years and a half old and the ballet starts at 3:00 o'clock. So if you want to work the full time, you cannot pick up your daughter at three pm to bring her to ballet. So you have to find a way how to do that. So majority of women work until 12 or 2 and then they take care of kids. I guess a bit more conservative in Carinthia than in Vienna, like all the big cities, also Graz is different mindset, I guess. I mean, I guess also in in Greece, if you live in Athens or if you live in some smaller city is different, but in [company name] is different because you know they attract so many diverse people from all around the world in the small city. And this is a culture. Yeah. Yeah. Perfectly aware. Yeah, they are aware of it. So I would say close to 10 that they are aware. Committed, we don't know, but yeah, let's assume. The awareness is there. Yes. Yeah, I would say close to.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: No, I have never experienced that and I never met anyone haven't said topic, yeah.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: So the company has some quota right or not quota but certain amount of women want to have a leading position at [company name] but you dont have those women going to university to study physics or electrical engineering. So it's very difficult to fill in that quota. So I'm afraid some mistakes can be made and that is dangerous because if you make a mistake and you hire the woman when she's not fulfilling that requirement then you send the wrong message. And that is much worse than to hire the man. I would say if you hire the woman which is incompetent and cannot do the job, but you do it because she's a woman, then the message is transmitted and the gossips flow. And this is definitely what we don't want to do. We need to go to the school and we need to change the mindset much earlier, but not on an female level when you're already professional, yeah.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Mmmm a woman with a kids and woman without kids is also different stuff, you know. So a woman with the kids here is the same as a man with the kids. You have certain additional responsibility, and you need to decide the hours, so you cannot work as much as you used to work without

the kids. I would differentiate that way. If you do not have a kids and you are a woman, I think nothing is hindering you to succeed, yeah. So there are certain rules. There is certain law, but there is mindset, right? And there are still some managers who do not appreciate the fact that the man is taken parental leave, and put pressure on the man. And it also happens at [company name], yes. But it depends again on the direct manager, yeah. There is a certain policy in Austria if woman takes maternity leave, it's for 12 months and there was a man decides to take, It's an additional two months. So the Austrian Government is aware of this topic and the increased by two months maternity leave overall, If the man decides to go for it. But I know I've seen men taken more than six months of maternity leave, so yeah. Even those men who want to take but the manager is not approving. That's actually positive discrimination. I call it. [..] No [a manager wouldn't reject the parental leave for the man], I say, I guess they're not allowed, but they will put you in the situations that you will not do that, yeah. Well, for example, my husband took attend to leave for three months and his manager was not finding the replacement for those three months, expecting that my husband will cover some of the urgent topics. So the facts that you do not eliminate someone to replace shows your relationship right towards that top, but not all are like that. Like I said, there are also a good cases respective cases. It's all about leadership, how you lead your people. Do you trust them or you don't trust them? Do you respect

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: No, I'm sure it will improve and I already see the signs of improvement, so the Carinthian government since 2-3 years, aware that you need to push the kindergarten and women to come back to work But how to say when you live in the poor country you have to work so there is no luxury of staying home and doing nothing, right or so as far as the economy goes, fine women will be relaxed not to work and as the economy goes bad then you're forced to go. That's how after Second World War Women Revolution started, right? So we were poor and we had to work and you can say it was, it was bad the Second World War, for sure, but gave rights to women, which they were dreaming before, but they didn't have them so. Austria is not so bad, there's some countries nearby called Germany, and if both of parents for example, you go to work in Germany and you have 40 plus percent tax, right? And if you are the only person working then and the second one stays at home, your tax is half, you pay 20% and until the moment we have those rules in Europe, women will not work. You have to cut those rules if you really want to empower the equal relationship. And also have this in Belgium, something like that was applying, yes. So instead of adjusting the amount of kindergartens and reducing the cost of those childcare, you are cutting by half the tax If the second one is not working, what's your position as European Union? Do you want to empower women? Do you want to empower the equal relationship or you just want as a person take care of the home ? Plus in the modern society there will be robots who will take care of the home? So what will be the role of the woman? Yep.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: OK. We all tend to be in the circles in the team, being surrounded by our friends. So and this is also transmitted to the leadership and how you succeed. So for sure, if you see the friend of yours and someone who is a good connection, you tend to work with that person, right and I'm not even sure it's about. Gender it's also about culture, so if you meet a Greek person in Austria, you feel connected, right? Very often, maybe not 100%, but in 50% you are connected. So if you have the common interest you are connected and by being a woman with a kids and there is single man without kids who have completely different interests with me, I would have this barrier. Yes. And as you go upwards, there are more and more men, so you feel less and less connected to them, correct? It exists. But I wouldn't say it's a gender related is also as a culture related topic. It exists obviously everywhere. Yeah.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: I think to empower men to take care of the kids, to extend their paternity leave, to promote the man who have children and do not have wives sitting at home taking care of kids. That is one of the clear sign because if you'll continue promoting men while women are not working, you're sending the wrong message. Please promote man with a woman who also go to work and take care. You both represent the equal family. Equal relationship, yes. Family, is a first exposure of the child, right. So the first years is a family and then the society. So if you see it in your family, is that your mother goes to work every day and spend the time at work and it's pretty natural to go to work. Then you grow in that condition and then when you go to school you have this mindset that it's fine and it's normal that woman is going to work. So I would say the core is a family. You do it in the family, you manage to transmit this message to the young children will grow into school university with this message and go to work. So family is a strength here.

Participant 4a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Generally, the company tries very hard in this area, and certainly, when hiring, I know because I talk to the hiring managers, they try to maintain a balance. However, they won't choose a woman just because she is a woman; they obviously want her to have the qualifications and to compete on an equal footing. If a woman has equal qualifications as a man, they will prefer the woman. Also, they really try to promote women into project management positions, as they believe that women are more organized, and they appreciate that. The company also runs several campaigns for Women's Day and diversity days, informing young girls in schools about what it's like to work in STEM fields. This is somewhat behind in Austria, as getting girls and young women involved in technical studies is less common. In recent years, I think they have been promoting women into management positions under certain conditions, yes. I'm not sure about the board quote, but I know that if a woman becomes pregnant, by Austrian law, she isn't required to work overtime, and her working hours are very specific. They try very hard to protect women during this process, and after giving birth, they provide the option to work part-time and receive additional benefits from the state. I believe a woman is entitled to this until the child is six years old. Generally, from what I've seen with colleagues who have either become pregnant or returned to work after maternity leave, they are not held back from promotions because they were absent. That impressed me. Two of my female colleagues were promoted before going on maternity leave; they became principals, which is a very high rank. One of them, upon returning, got promoted immediately. Well, it's also a bit different since the company is German, and they value tenure more than excellence. It is common for men also to take paternity leave.Yes, yes, and they promote it, and the state does too because if parental leave is shared with the father, you get an extra two-month bonus. So, the state encourages this. Usually, what they do is the father takes "papa month" at the beginning, then the mother takes maternity leave, and at the end, when the mother's leave is over, the father takes another two months. Both have the option to split it half and half.These are mandated by law, but [company's name] supports it a lot.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: Yes, 8-9. I believe that the work environment in Austria is very supportive, and the workers' union also plays a significant role in this. The rights of all employees, regardless of gender, are strongly supported. For example, my company tries very hard, but for the rest of Austria, I don't know. However, if I compare it to what I hear from friends in Greece, it's a different story. For instance, a friend of mine who is a police officer, which is a very public sector job, gets only the minimum benefits defined

by law, while others get the bare minimum.I've heard of cases where people get only the four months stipulated by law. If you're self-employed, I don't think you have any benefits at all.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: Look, I have an example. Actually, I have two examples. I don't know if they exactly fit your question. Once, a colleague from Poland made very strange comments. He would say things like, "Oh, you're dressed like a woman today," if I wore a dress in the summer. Or during a conversation about electric cars, he would say, "How do you know about this, since you're a woman?" On our floor, the ratio is about 30-70 or 40-60 women to men. This behavior was quite unusual, and it surprised many colleagues. They triggered a response. I didn't trigger it as much as my male colleagues did. They discussed it with his manager, and I heard he even had a conversation with HR about it. After that, he was much more careful with what he said. The male colleagues, especially with HR, handled it. I also know of a case of sexual harassment where HR took significant action. However, there's another case involving a close colleague who felt her manager was biased against her. She reported it to the workers' union, claiming gender bias. The thing is, we know the manager, and the bias might have been personal rather than gender-based. Gender can be a sensitive issue because it's easy to claim sexism or gender bias. But I saw that the union assessed it very well, focusing on whether the discrimination was personal or gender-based. This is important because it can lead to other issues. It's generally very important to support women in management, but as women, we often have to prove our worth much more than a man at the same level.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: In a small company, I believe that financial reasons would definitely be a consideration. This would certainly be a factor, especially in a Greek company that aims to achieve results in a short time with few resources and a small workforce. They might think that it's a big fuss over nothing. They might question whether they have the resources for these initiatives or worry that if they promote hiring more women, they might have higher turnover. A big fear for employers is that if they hire a woman, she might go on maternity leave and leave the company.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Definitely the social environment. If a woman is very polite and social and does networking, they might say, "She's too soft to be a manager." And if she's very strict and tough, they might call her [curse word]. So, certainly, the social constraints surrounding the position. Another factor could definitely be family. If a woman has one or two children, it will set her back at least 1-2 years. Even if she's in a large organization that supports her and promotes her when necessary, she still won't have the same advantage as a man. Usually, when I think of one or two cases of women in very high positions, they either had a very supportive husband or did not have a family. Unfortunately. maybe this will change in the future.

Interviewer: Yes. Have you experienced any bias in your career?

Participant: I can't say for sure because in Austria, there's always the factor of whether you're Austrian or German-speaking in general. I believe this presents another obstacle. What I see more often is that when we talk to Asian countries for projects, there is some discrimination when they hear a woman's voice, especially a young woman's. They question why you're in that position. You have to prove yourself, repeat yourself, and be more strict with your demands. But generally, they are supportive so far.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: I would like to see more women, definitely, and I believe we can achieve a lot together. That's why more associations are gradually being created, and I think many men now see and support that we can accomplish a lot in leadership. It's just a matter of time. I believe that with the new generations and the young people we interact with compared to previous generations, it's evolving. I think that in the coming years, we will reach a more balanced number, and gradually, we won't have to

prove our worth so much. If you think about the past 100 years—now it's 2024—I'm sure that previous generations of women had an even harder time. For example, my mother worked and managed the household while my father also worked, but it wasn't as equally shared. Now things are becoming a bit fairer in that regard, so yes.

Interviewer: In comparison, what do you have to say? What is your overall experience and opinion about the work environment in the two countries, and how supportive is one compared to the other?

Participant: Well, some major differences I see are in the work mentality. In Greece, many of my fellow students have to work at least 8 or 10 hours daily, or for instance, they cannot leave if the boss hasn't left. On Fridays, there's no reduced schedule. Sometimes they have to work weekends or take some calls. Here, the schedule is fairer, and it's something I discuss a lot with my manager. You have your eight-hour workday, and although sometimes, due to high workload, you might work extra hours, it's not the norm. You see a very different mentality in how we work in Greece compared to here, and it's something we Greeks find hard to let go of. The only thing I have seen is the difficulty sometimes in hiring a woman. They might ask intrusive questions like, "Are you married? Do you have children?" or "Are you planning to have children in the next few years?" These are questions that were never asked during my interview here. When I eventually discussed with my manager about how I see myself in the next few years, I was initially afraid to mention that I'd like to start a family. When I shyly brought it up, he told me that it's the most common, most normal thing, and they support it. It's a large organization, and we always support our team. For instance, right now, I can tell you that 2-3 women are definitely on maternity leave, and it's a common occurrence.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: In general, there is a glass ceiling for both genders in an organization like [company name]. You can reach a certain pay grade, and if you want to advance further, you need to change scale, meaning you have to move towards management, like project management. If you're a technical expert, you can't advance without moving into project management. As for women, I don't have a more specific experience, but from some statistics I've seen, women usually receive promotions a bit more slowly. These promotions come eventually but take longer.

Interviewer: Do you believe it's just a matter of time? That if you're deserving, you will eventually rise, but it's delayed due to family obligations or because it takes more time to prove your capabilities?

Participant: Both, yes. I have an example where I had to prove myself for two years to get a promotion, while a colleague who was known a bit better received it in one year. I'm not sure if it was a matter of gender or how well they knew his skills.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: Education needs to change from the start, for children. Children take what you tell them as normal, as a code, so we shouldn't impose gender distinctions regarding jobs. For example, the man is the firefighter, the technician, the electrician, and the woman is the philologist, the teacher, the nurse, and shown as a housewife in domestic economy lessons at school. Show children that both men and women work and support the household. It's about how represented women are in the workplace and in which professions. If you think about it, women have often had to take on leading roles even within the family. Even if she didn't work, she had to manage the household, essentially being a leader there. She was just limited to that role and wasn't given the opportunity to easily study, get a job, and showcase her abilities. So, I believe it's somewhat in a woman's nature to move in this direction and companies should exploit that. Maybe I'm thinking too much like a feminist. It's funny to say. How can I put it? Women have learned to be leaders, just not in a company. Women who manage projects are often more organized and do better than men, who can be more chaotic. But I don't know if this is a stereotype

because it could be one from previous years. I hope in general that discrimination improves in the coming years. I certainly see it improving in France, where I was before, and in Austria now. I hope it also progresses in Greece. I've noticed that in schools, over the years, more women have entered technical schools. That's a sign, a first step.

Participant 5a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: I know that the company has like policies,. I mean, I've never heard it officially, but that's what they were saying rumors in the corridors that there is a policy that by 2030 half of the team leaders and managers should be women. I think in Austria, I mean, I don't know specifically because it was never directly involved in pregnancy situations, but I know that in Austria it's quite a lot of benefit about.Women getting time off for the pregnancy and the kid, and quite a lot. Actually, if I compare to Italy, which is my country, OK, you're comparing with Greece, but here it's really a huge opportunity and they have to to be reintegrated in the same position as they were even after I don't know up to three years. Something like this. So I find it good policy. What it helps also is that in Austria they have more paternity leave, which is not common in other places, so it's more time and these I see it's being used. Maybe more than in the past, so this allows also women to pursue also career and not being stopped or penalised by pregnancy. Regarding promotions, OK, My view and what I saw is that gender it shouldn't matter, right? The gender shouldn't be influencing promotions. But when you have a policy that you have some fixed number target like half of the manager should be women and in this industry, the women are the 15% or the 20% of the all employees and all the people and then it's some external push that it's in a in direct way helping maybe the few women to have a faster career. But this is my just my perspective and I'm not saying they don't deserve it, but yeah, it's a fact given that there are minority in my field and may can not be filled with skilled people. My first manager in the job in Austria was a woman, but now that I think about it, she didn't have kids. So maybe is not the case, but I've seen women being promoted in their, let's say, fertile age, but like normally not like something unfair compared to men.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: I would say 8. I have the feeling that in Austria, if I can compare it to my home country it's the awareness is much higher and this is a topic which is felt everywhere, especially I don't know in leading edge companies. I don't know how it is in the public administration sector. I really have no idea because I don't care much about the Austrian bureaucracy and the government system. But I don't know in my company, the CEO is a woman and I've seen and also in many other big companies here in Austria that there are women that have a responsibility roles so I would say.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: I don't know about such cases. I was involved with myself in a small thing and I took action, but I'm not the company. There was a time that we were doing a stupid map on how to place people in seats in the office, and this office is like, I don't know, eight men and one woman, and the discussion was carried on by the manager of this is a girl and he was placing the labels on the seats and the curious thing was that everyone was marked by his last name and then there is the girl was marked by Theressa and it felt to me like, what is she a kid and why we are all of us with this last name and she has to be there is it looks like that this he was not doing it intentionally but it looked to me like she was ın a lower position where we would distinct and she didn't say anything and I said like maybe also Theresa wants to be labelled with her last name. And she acknowledged it. And then privately, she told me, thanks for saying, I mean, if I do it, they call me feminist. And I just felt it was unfair and different treatment. Also

he said something like, OK, but she's the only woman. She's our Theressa, I don't know if she's our Teresa. She's definitely not mine.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: In my opinion, which is mostly influenced on where I work. Working in semiconductor industry, it's a very technical field and as we know in the technical fields mainly nowadays, it's still I don't know, 70% of men even more. So I find that in this kind of with these constraints, it's very hard to implement gender equality policies because whenever you implement them, you are already applying inequalities towards man just because they are much more so I find it very hard. I'd rather in these fields try to promote technical knowledge from school to women, something that should be or if it's something that should be starting from companies, it's something cultural and it should be starting from education point of view, where we still see some jobs that fit more to men and some others that fit more to women. So what should be done is to really let's say raise awareness about equality at that level, because when you are a kid, you mostly don't have prejudice and you shouldn't build them. So this is where I would do it. I understand it nowadays. It's also necessary to do it at company and industrial level. So even if I find sometimes these policies unfair, I think it's unavoidable because something has to be done just the targets should be realistic, gradual and yeah, so that it can be more easily accepted. But I still think that on the long run should start from educational system.

Interviewer: Question 5

Participant: Men mainly. Yeah, yeah. Of course, I mean it's alive. We just say that men are not sexist, the most of them, they still are, and this is still a prejudice. That is, let's say, putting these advantages for women trying to reach these positions. And I think it's culture like we still uh, it's much better than in the past, but I think we still suffer from patriarchy culture in Europe or let's say in Christian countries, I don't know, maybe Muslim is even worse, I don't know. But this is still a barrier that is making it harder for women. I believe that to reach the same position, a woman still has to prove Uh, much more than a man should. So this is this is mainly the problem.In this sense, maybe this gender equality policy can help because somehow you force some situations and men will need to adapt either they want it or not, so they will just adapt and learn something about it. And ideally on the long run this will just be a natural process without any prejudice and of course, the maternity thing. The maternity think, I mean, in Austria, I find again much better than other places. I've seen that the payment equality is already in place. I think women and men earn the same money for the same position. We'll see another It is not true because women are paid less just because the employer knows that for some time the woman will not be able to be there, and so this is just like a way to prevent to pay more. So yeah, I think this[paygap] is still an obstacle, but I've been seeing in this country that they have quite good welfare policy for maternity in terms of paid maternity, in terms of position rights. And as I said also giving more time to fathers. I don't think there is any natural predefined behaviour difference between women and men. Of course it is society that gives us biases and creates differences, but no naturally would say no difference and no prevention to the topics of leading and regarding family, I mean I'm not in the situation of having a family with kids yet, so I cannot really judge it from my perspective. What I've seen from my family was grown up is both of my parents were working but the like family load was mainly carried by my mother and I think this is still the case in the majority of families. Also in Austria, but again I don't know, I mean I would say something good that is maybe not nice to say, but I'm still surprised when I've seen in Austin something I've never seen before in Italy in my past that is during working time, two men going around with their strollers and they're walking their kids and talking like two friends going out with kids and this is something I've always and ever seen with the women. So I think it is progressing faster here than in other places.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant:No, ideally I think in I don't know, 10-20 years we will not need any more this kind of rules and policies for gender equality. I think in 20 years it will just have become a natural thing and we will have naturally more women in leading position, maybe even more women than men in leading position. I've read research is that I mean there are some proofs that women female leaders have achieved results and goals in a more structured and creative way than teams before, so it's good also to bring a new perspective. I think really think that in 20 years this will just be the normality. I don't see it as something which is done what I hear around is that we have gender equality already in everything. Of course this is on the law and this is on the paper, but this is not on the fact and on the culture, so it will get a couple of decades in my opinion to get there. But I'm positive that we will get there and what I think is that also man will benefit from these because it's still in this pattern, he culture, we come from. This also puts a lot of pressure on men that sometimes we underestimate because it is normal that men should have power. And this is just normal. But it will also release some of social and cultural pressure on men. And this can only be good also for men, yeah.

Interviewer:, Question 7

Participant: Those seven years have been working, which is not much. I've never experienced something like this. Where I used to work, I've seen women progressing in their careers and they didn't, I mean good performance, even bad ones, so. Let's say you know I didn't experience that. I'm fully aware these exists. I'm not saying it's. something without any meaning or any sense, but personally I cannot report something like this.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: This is a very hard question. I mean, I know already what it is done to try to break the glass ceiling, which is exactly these gender equality policies that put target with numbers. So somehow you are forced to break the ceiling at some point because you have to reach a target and you are behind with schedule and you do it.Then of course as I said, the problem of this methodology is that you might promote people that don't deserve it or that they are not good enough for the role.   From society, this sounds stupid, but I would stop selling pink toys with the kitchens and the small vacuum cleaners in a pink colour and advertising it with small girls, I mean, in my opinion, it is really cultural and it starts from there, so not injecting stereotypes and bias on kids. So really, from school to show also when they don't know when they study history or philosophy to show stories about women in history. OK, they are much less because of everything we know. But to highlight them somehow that it's not only great men that did something, but there was also something done by women so that also the boys will take it as a normal thing and the girls will have more ambition and aspire to do something different. And second thing is to explain and, this has to be done with the policy of welfare that you can have a baby. You can really take care of yourself and the baby in the first months without being penalised in salary or career. So if you are a team leader and you have a kid you will be replaced from someone else because OK, you cannot lead something from home without working. But when it's the time to be back, you maybe not in the same role, because OK, things progress, but you should have a role with the same responsibility and not losing track. I don't find what they're doing with movies like these Disney movies that sometimes are they're cancelling because of racism and this is, I find it stupid there, I think family should be there to explain that this was done in the past and now it is different. But making money on this kind of partner culture is, I find it really criminal. You can still sell sell toys and advertise them in a different way. It's not that you have to go bankrupt and close. So yeah.

Participant 6a

Interviewer: Question 1

Participant: Oh yeah, so I don't know about exact the policies. I just know that the company is in general taking care of the equality as much as it is possible and as much as it is possible to do it not only on paper, as you know that it was, for example, the diversity week some weeks ago and which I found actually very cool because the company is really showing their sustainability from this point of view in this area and there were several interviews persuaded with some top managers who were really very honestly, sharing their experience doing their career. So I don't know if you had the chance to listen to our Chief digital officer and she was talking about her experience in this, if you can find it in recording, I do recommend you, even for your master thesis to do so because she was really giving super cool insights about how people are biassed towards their working moms, and yeah. So in general, I mean there are no how to say there are no real boundaries which exist at [company name] and from what I know. But of course we are not talking about something. What exists anyway, so like biases or stereotyping or glass ceiling or whatever, but exactly about the gender equality policies. It's not something that I am aware about, so for this I need the preparation so I didn't have the chance to you told me not to prepare. So the exact policies aligned with European Union I don't know, but for sure if you're going to search for on the website, then for sure you're going to find something. In constant trainings in general, so also in recruiting people are doing are being constantly trained against their biases in the recruiting on the recruiting phase as well as the managers for example. And of course, we as the managers and team leads, we are also doing different trainings when we have to take into account cultural differences as well as for example, there was some workshop now on avoiding biases and so on. So this is the things which are do exist. They are good in theory, but when it comes to the practice all companies are facing some issues. Yeah, because company is about people and people are different, we can't avoid biases or stereotypes. We can learn to be aware of them. Right? So we are learning how we have these biases and we learn how to be conscious so, but not everybody is aware of such biases. That's why they do exist.

Interviewer: Question 2

Participant: Oh, I worked for several Austrian companies. I also was involved with some companies being, let's call them clients. Yeah. And the consultant for these companies and it very depends of course, when we are talking about big international companies here, we are talking about high awareness, which is most probably on the level of 7-8. I wouldn't say 9-10, but 7-8 might be in the big international companies when we are talking about small Austrian companies of course the picture is a bit different. I've had several situations when men leaders were saying no, we are not employing women because they are to go to maternity leave and no, we are not promoting women. They were just saying this directly into the face. But of course, the companies which are locally grown in Austria, which have the maybe some historical background, when they are inherited from one person to another in during the long period of time or the owner is, let's say old-style person. In this case of course, the perception of women are staying the same as it was before, so and they do promote mostly men. But it's not like they promote, they're just taking somebody from their close environment and it's usually the family business. And in this case, of course, we can talk about a high level of discrimination and low level of awareness. I would say, even if they are aware, they don't want to change anything. So they don't want to change anything because they think that's how the things are working and many people, young people who are coming to such companies and they don't find any other options for growing or developing their leaving such companies. So that's that what I see a lot of not a lot let's say many Austrian companies are facing at least in some regions and of course it also depends on how open this company is. So if the company is for example working a lot with international environment with some suppliers from other countries, which are involving also in other international employees, even if it's a small company, then they have to be more open minded. Then they're growing their awareness and owners are saying like OK Now we need to get some trainings, we need to get some workshops for our people and so on. But the question is how

far it works. So if even if they try to increase their awareness in such companies, the old style people, they will still follow their line. At [company name], of course, here we are talking about international company and has to follow some values has to follow the qualities of sustainability, social sustainability in this case and of course inclusion and diversity. This is the big questions. And here I would say that of course the awareness is a much higher level. So involving different things like diversity, weeks or inclusion weeks or women in stem or women in leadership. So of course there are a lot of different programmes. I am talking about, by the way, implemented the gender equality policies, I think that this is one of the policies which is implemented as an opinion. This is the «women in STEM» Yeah. So this is a big programme which is going across Europe. So to attract more women in the stem in the STEM Industry also in the mathematics, whatever in the microelectronics and so on. So I think that this is one of the policies we can which we can refer to. So as long as you're not being discriminated, this is already good for some companies. So. I faced quite weird questions many years ago though by interviewers, for example, as the woman when they asked me how old I am and I said that I'm 30 and the interviewer asked me directly. Oh, but you would like to have kids soon, you know. And that was not something that he would say like, oh, this is good. No, it was like, oh, but you're going to leave for maternity leave. This is not something what the men gonna be asked. Yeah. So although there is also the possibility for fathers to go to the paternity leave in Austria and it's highly appreciated, but at the same time people are not asking the guy coming for the interview, are you are 30 and you Most probably would like to get married soon and have kids. So and this question itself is already showing the position of the company regarding empowering women. It's not about empowering, it's minimising the input of the women I would say. I can say between not for the records I'm doing the workshops for the companies on the unconscious bias and I'm doing also the workshops the workshops for job searchers at the [local organisation] we are doing the workshops on how to avoid the unconscious biases during the interview. If the interviewer is biassed towards you. So I can tell you honestly, yes, there are a lot of situations when these questions are being asked because people, interviewers, I'm not talking about [company name] only I'm talking about on interviewers are not aware, even if they are aware about their biases. They think that this is not so important, but then we get the confirmation bias. Then we get the law effect, whatever, and then the people who are hired are not really people who should be hired just because the recruiters are not properly trained. This is about people you know, we all have biases and it's just a matter of increasing the awareness about it and follow up these policies. You know it's not enough just to create the policy but it's about the consistency and constant work on it.

Interviewer: Question 3

Participant: Let me think.. There was a situation talking to the clients and the client was a man. Yeah, and I was at the meeting together with another colleague, actually at the meetings and emails and whatever. And he was writing his emails in pretty discriminative way, It felt very bad. And then I asked our project manager to be involved in several calls. And the project manager and another colleague said like you know, I don't have time why is it so important for me to be there? And I said look, because we are there two with my colleague, female colleague. And we do feel the need for diversification. Therefore diversity at our calls and he immediately agreed. He didn't ask any other questions which was highly appreciated. And when they joined, it was really the situation turned out completely different. So the person from another side behaved absolutely differently, although that is very smart person. I learned him afterwards, we got to know each other better. But this is something what he has in his mind coming from the country, let's say from another country, not from Austria. Where such behaviour is fine, you know, and there was not some open discrimination or whatever, but it was just the way. And I was really highly appreciating the colleagues from the company when they really stood up for us and they not maybe openly protected me and my colleague, but they took over the initiative and they were on our side and in

general, honestly, I do appreciate highly also my manager who is always on my side because I have also female manager and I do think that not each manager understands the situation properly, you know, so some female managers, they still can be pretty narrowed. Let's stay in there. You're conservative. Exactly. And it is very important. So that to have this open communication and to be on the same page.

Interviewer: Question 4

Participant: Oh, but I mean, it depends on the company. You know, small companies are of course, for bigger companies, it's easier, as I said, also because uh, if for example, I go to maternity leave now, it will be not so difficult to find the substitution for me, right. So it will be yeah, maybe maybe will take a while, but they will allocate my tasks or whatever or they will take somebody for a short period of time. For small companies, of course it's different obstacles. Yeah. They have to change a lot in their business processes in most of the cases. So I think that the standardisation of the business processes of the Austrian companies are one of the factors which is influencing the fact that they can't implement the European policies faster and I don't think that they really think that they need it. They have the standard clients, they are not exposed to become validations, let's say or different changes in the market, yeah. They don't understand that diversity can create some add value for them.So I think, yeah, so it depends. It depends on the company of course. But one of the challenges is the sanitised business processes I would say and the traditional approach or conservatism as you said. I think it's about open mindset. So the size maybe not. So there's some big Austrian companies who can also discriminate women. You know, it's about the mindset which the company has. It's about how the company was growing. Is it if it is, for example, a very small company located in the middle of nowhere where people know each other since they were kids and growing together and working for the same company and not being exposed to any international things, this creates its own mindset.So of course in this case, the location of the company there, the management of the company because it comes from up. You can't draw mindset from down in this situation. It has to come from up. It's the same about. It's not only about companies, it's the same about cities.It's same about countries.Yeah.

Interviewer:. Question 5

Participant: If you are not talking about personal qualities and personal skills, then this is of course. So some women. Yeah. I can't talk for all women. Yeah, some women put different priorities. So for somebody family, it's more important. Yeah. And they put the priority as a family, not work then. Then they don't go for the leadership position. But if they want to go for the leadership position and they put work as the priority, then as we discussed the biases and stereotyping, sometimes making this difficult because managers think like, OK, she will go for kids, her kids will get sick. This is very standard. Nothing changed, you know. In 10s of years so that a woman will prioritise family, that the kids gonna get sick. In this case, yeah. So this the simple perceptions it can come not only from men, it can come from women as well. Yeah. So the perception of one woman of the another woman. Yeah. So that it will not be another thing that it depends. Of course. There are other gender biases when, for example, if the team consists only of men and the leader has to become a woman, yeah, so that might be an obstacle for the manager above, who wants to promote this person or not for the leadership position. So whether the same we have here the agenda or the age bias is for example the person, the woman is younger and especially if it's a woman and younger also has to lead the team of men, so then all the factors coming together so in this case there are a lot of factors which can prevent, yeah, so, but mostly this is the let's say like this, there can be factors on the level of the company. If the company is not supporting development of the women in leadership, this can be the level of department when the department is concentrated mostly on promoting men. And this can be the personal level. So when the manager is not trusting women or is not sure about women in leadership.So there are there are three different different levels. Yeah, in this case.

What else can be depends on the tasks of course so, but I would say that mostly the main factor is it's of course the perception of woman as the family person, I mean this is this is one of the main ones. If you are not taking into account of course the fact that men are better in the engineering for example or better in some specific men's profession, yeah. So when we are talking like AH, but men is better in it and so on. So then they will be promoted, but for leadership in general the belonging to some profession is not the main point. Yeah. So the person has to have the management skills and leadership skills rather than the the professional skills.. If you're gonna check also for, I mean, I can tell you as a trainer now. Yeah. So if you're gonna check for some advertisements. Yeah. Even it starts from the advertisement out of the job. And for some positions when they're so-called men and female words. So for example, for female, if you're going to talk, if you're going to say cooperative, supportive and so on. Yeah. And for men, we are talking about Competitive and so on. So in this case, if you if you read different ads, job ads and you will see that in Austria it's obligatory to put male, female and diverse, yeah, but depending on which words the company is using for describing the position, then it will be perceived better by men or perceived by by women. Yeah. So of course there are men's and women's professionals, which are getting less and less now, but it starts from the fact that I'm sorry. But when the kid is small or little, yeah, we have blue and pink still. So we are not so far from from what it was before at the end of the day. So if you dress up your boy in pink. Most probably you will get some comments on it.

Interviewer: Question 6

Participant: No. Now we have we have this. I mean, you know, this is the question of the next steps which gonna be done? Yeah, it's again. It's not enough just to scream on the European level about the changes. It doesn't change the companies. You can scream about it. You can talk about it. You can, I don't know talk about Pride Month or diversity or whatever, but on the local levels, the things are changing very slow and I'm not talking about [company name] here. I don't have any doubts here that it will continue developing in the right direction. Yeah so if nothing happens.As it is for most of the international companies. I worked at least for three different international companies and it was quite clear that women were there on the leadership positions. But in the small companies in the local companies traditional society, you know, I don't know why. Actually I can talk only about Carinthia in this case, maybe in other areas it's different. It might be. But we are talking here about traditional society and you know this if you're going to check according to cultural differences, you know. The obstacles to women attaining leading positions, as mentioned by the participant, include the slow pace of change at local levels within traditional societies. While international companies may demonstrate progress in promoting women to leadership positions, smaller and local companies within traditional societies tend to lag behind. Cultural differences and societal norms contribute to these obstacles, creating challenges for women seeking advancement in their careers.

Interviewer: Question 7

Participant: I didn't have actually. I was lucky. I think. I'm sure that I will face it later. Might face it later, but it's not only about gender only, but other factors might be. So this can be the combination of cultural factor, national factor, ethnicity, age, whatever. Whatever. Yeah. So but regarding the gender exactly gender factor, I think I was lucky not to face this not yet I mean I'm not on so high level. But my manager, for example, she's female, the manager of my manager is female, so the manager of my manager, the manager is also female. So in this case, you know it's a bit, different. Maybe in the business units like Engineering's part there is a bit different story might be.

Interviewer: Question 8

Participant: From society women have to have to position themselves. They shouldn't be silent. Because we are swallowing a lot and then we are. I mean, I'm not talking about feminism. This is completely different story. Yeah. So I'm talking about women who wants to be promoted, who wants to

become the leaders and we in most of the cases have to work twice at least twice harder to to get that, yeah. But it's again depends on the place. Yeah, if we are talking about, for example, some nursery house, then most probably there were mostly women and they're all in leadership. But when we are talking about such industries as STEM or whatever, then it's a bit different story so women have to come clear with their goals, and society can support them by providing them the clear support in during the maternity leave during the building the families, for example. It's difficult to find the kindergarten here, there are not enough places. You have to go to work full time so that you can get place in the kindergarten society is not supporting this and if you're losing 1-2 years sitting with a child and maternity leave.Yeah, it happens. What it happens, society has to provide women with more flexibility, with more maybe to promote more paternity leave as well. Rather than maternity leave. I mean, the rights are equal. Yeah. In this case, no. OK, if you're not breastfeeding. But there are also different options. Yeah. And Company has to do a lot to support women. That's going for one year to maternity leave. It's not going for the whole life. Yeah. So it's not excluding you from life, and it's giving you much more. Another thing which is also is highly appreciated. For example from my manager and I do appreciate is the part time leadership positions. So when I have the time so I can balance my work and my family. In this case, I don't have to sacrifice anything. Yeah, I'm working 30 hours and I have time to pick up my daughter from after school activities. Yeah. And at the same time, I can fully be involved during the working hours or flexible working hours, which is also very important because then I don't have to be stressed during my meetings. I'm putting the meetings when I have time or when people have time. And this is everything. What women actually have to position as well, and what society can do as well. And the companies, of course regarding EU and as I've said, yeah, they can push whatever. But on such high level, who cares? I mean it's like giving the KPIs, you know they give the KPIs to the company and the company is trying to make to reach these KPIs. But reaching these KPIs , alot of focus are being lost from my point of view. So it's we are losing the focus from their personality to just the KPI woman as a KPI, OK, have five women in my team. Yeah. But I am in HR and how many women in our team we have in general because we are in HR and how many women we have in engineering, you know, so. This is this, this balance, and this is this story when we are talking about just taking people KPIs and not a woman as a personality with their own wishes, with their own skills, with their own abilities, with their own I don't know dreams and goals, and of course. When we are talking about building the team depends on the team. But again, as I repeat myself just to have one training doesn't give anything. It has to be the consistent follow up. It has to be the consistent programme. So it's really important to be consistent in what you're doing to do some follow-ups to do some additional trainings, additional awareness campaigns and to track the development of it. I'm not the big fan of laws. They're not helping in my point of view in this situation. It's when we are not talking about crimes in this situation, the laws are just pushing the company, as I said, to reach their KPIs but not to really to support women. And they are promotions or reaching their leadership positions, leader positions.

10.3 Interview Analysis

The following section presents the analysis and evaluation of the empirical interviews. Due to space constraints, a condensed version is provided. The accompanying image, however, illustrates the detailed methodology.