

FEM·ABLE



FEM-ABLE

Promoting women's participation
in the political domain

NATIONAL REPORT FOR CYPRUS

Deliverable D2.2

CSI-Center for Social Innovation- Paschalia Leventi

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



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DELIVERABLE INFORMATION

Grant Agreement	Title
Project acronym	FEM-ABLE
Project title	PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL DOMAIN
Project timeframe and duration	2023-2025
Project reference number	CERV-2022-GE / nº 101088295
WP	WP2: Research & Mapping of Gender Equality Strategies
Task	T2.3. Drafting of FEMABLE Policies
Deliverable	D2.2 Policy toolkit – National Report for Cyprus
Status	Final version
Version number	V1
Deliverable responsible	Associació La Xixa Teatre
Dissemination level	PUB
Due date	30/09/2023
Date of submission	30/09/2023

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1. Overview of the Cypriot political and social landscape

Cyprus is an island located at the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. The island lies at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia. It is the third largest and third most populous island in the Mediterranean as the population of the Republic of Cyprus reaches an approximation of 1,2 million people.

The geostrategic location of Cyprus at the crossroads of three continents and the friendly diplomatic relations with regional neighbours and beyond, have enabled the island establishment of Cyprus being an international business centre and a key factor in the Eastern Mediterranean. The island's location has also permitted the formation of its huge history of being a colony to several states up until 1974 where the island was invaded, military occupied, and as a consequence, be divided by Turkey. The island remains occupied and divided until today. The island is divided into the northern and southern part, where the Republic of Cyprus controls the southern part of the island. The Turkish occupied northern part of the island is a pseudo-state, as the self-declared "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" is only recognised by Turkey [UN Security Council resolution 541 (1983) [Cyprus].

Cyprus is considered a developed country. It has a high-income economy and ranks relatively well on various socio-economic indicators. The country has made significant progress in areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and standard of living.

Cyprus has a diverse and service-oriented economy. Key sectors include tourism, financial services, shipping, and professional services. The tourism industry, in particular, plays a crucial role in the country's economy, attracting visitors from around the world. Cyprus has a relatively high HDI score, indicating a good overall standard of living, access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Due to economic challenges and disparities, regional disparities, youth unemployment, and ongoing political challenges related to the division of the island, Cyprus faces several challenges in relevant and further areas of improvement, including education, healthcare, employment and standard of living and its overall socioeconomic development.

The 1960 constitution (explained below) established a framework for power-sharing between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Decisions on significant matters necessitated separate parliamentary majorities, and both the Greek Cypriot president and the Turkish Cypriot vice president held veto powers over crucial determinations.

The political landscape of the island is shaped by democracy. The system and regime of governance of Cyprus is a Presidential Democracy. Specifically, the Republic of Cyprus is unitary presidential representative republic. The governmental system is presidential, with a clear separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. Legislative power is endowed in the government and the Parliament- House of Representatives. Legislative powers are distributed between the government and the parliament, and the judiciary operates independently, separate from the executive and legislative branches.

Presidential terms span five years, with the most recent presidential election occurring in February 2023, electing the 8th president of the Republic of Cyprus. The President of Cyprus assumes the dual role of head of state and head of government, while the government wields executive authority. Ministers, appointed by the presidents, are ineligible to hold seats in the House of Representatives. Members of the House of Representatives are elected via proportional representation, serving standard of five-year terms.

1.1 Political landscape

Cyprus, the small island in the Mediterranean, has a rich history that has firstly and foremost influenced and formatted its political landscape. The island was conquered by various civilisations throughout history, including the Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, and Romans. In the 16th century, Cyprus was conquered by the Ottoman Empire and remained under Ottoman rule until the late 19th century. Until 1959 Cyprus was a British colony; struggled for independence, negotiations for a political settlement, and the eventual establishment of an independent Republic of Cyprus that was gained in 1960. The island became unitary state of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots while Britain, Greece and Turkey drafted a constitution, along with the Treaties of Guarantee and Alliance. The constitution and the two accompanying treaties (Greece and Turkey) instituted a complex power-sharing structure between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Turkey, Greece and Britain were designed guarantors of the independence, territorial integrity and security of the Republic. The constitution stipulated that the presidency would be held by a Greek Cypriot, while the Turkish Cypriot community would be granted the vice-president, three ministerial positions out of a total of 10. Additionally, they were allocated 15 out of the 50 seats in the House of Representatives. However, following intercommunal conflict in 1963, the Turkish Cypriots vacated their seats. Over time, the number of ministerial positions increased to 11, all of which were assumed by Greek Cypriots, and the number of parliamentary seats expanded to 80. According to the constitution, 30% of these seats (24) are reserved for Turkish Cypriots, but they have remained unoccupied.

The island's most recent history was marked on 15th of July 1974 when the Cypriot coup occurred, backed by the military junta in power in Greece, overthrowing the Cypriot Government and targeting the Cypriot President Archbishop Makarios III; overturning the democratically elected government. The intention of the military coup was the annexation of Cyprus to Greece. On the 20th of July 1974, Turkey invaded the island illegally by sending their troops and military forces in order to -as they claim-support the Turkish-Cypriot community. This resulted to the division of the island until today, where Nicosia is the world's last divided capital since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Until today, the non-occupied area of Cyprus is controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, with almost entirely Greek-Cypriot population, while the population of the occupied area of the island, is controlled by the "Turkish Republic of Norther Cyprus" (recognised only by Turkey) with Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish residents with around 42,000 Turkish troops.

The Republic of Cyprus has its oldest established political party in the form of the Progressive Party of the Working People ('*Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou*'; AKEL), which was founded in 1941 as the continuation of the Communist Party of Cyprus which was founded in 1926. AKEL, a communist party that held sway over the primary trade union federation, garnered approximately one-third of the vote during the first 25 years of the Republic of Cyprus. Various other political parties have seen differing levels of success. These include the Movement of Social Democrats EDEK ('*Kinima Sosialdimokraton*'; EDEK) and the Democratic Rally ('*Dimokratikos Synagermo's*'; DISY).

Currently, the political landscape is dominated by two major political parties:

Democratic Rally (DISY): DISY is a center-right party and has been historically one of the most influential parties in Cyprus. It promotes conservative and liberal economic policies, with a Christian democratic ideology. Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL): AKEL is a left-wing party with communist roots. It advocates for social justice, workers' rights, and reunification of the island.

Other (parliamentary) parties include:

- Democratic Party-DIKO (Greek Cypriot nationalists)
- Movement for Social Democracy-EDEK (Social democracy)
- Democratic Front/Alignment-DEPA (Liberalism)
- Movement of Ecologists – Citizens' Cooperation/Ecologist Greens-KOSP (Green politics)
- National Popular Front-ELAM (National conservatists and nationalists)

In order to secure majority support in the parliament and establish governments, political parties frequently come together to create coalitions and alliances. Cyprus' political scene is marked by vibrant discussions, the dynamics of coalition-building, and periodic fluctuations

in party favourability, often influenced by factors like economic conditions, reunification initiatives, and governance.

It is important to note that the Cyprus dispute and the division of the island have influenced political dynamics in Cyprus. The quest for a resolution and reunification between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities remains a central issue in Cypriot politics, with different parties adopting varying positions on the matter.

1.2 Social landscape

Cyprus is a small country with two religions and two official languages. Cypriots place a strong emphasis on hierarchy, a cultural trait influenced by their primary religions, Islam among the Turkish-Cypriot community and Greek Orthodox among the Greek-Cypriot community. Respect is granted to individuals based on their age and social standing, with older individuals regarded as sources of wisdom and deserving of admiration. Cyprus boasts a linguistically diverse landscape shaped by its intricate history and cultural variety. The island recognises two official languages: Greek and Turkish reflecting the longstanding division between Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north. Greek is the predominant language of the Greek-Cypriot community, using the Cypriot dialect, while Turkish is predominantly used in the north by Turkish Cypriots, as well as the Cypriot dialect.

Additionally, English is widely spoken and functions as a common language, particularly in business and tourism sectors. This linguistic diversity not only reflects Cyprus's unique heritage but also plays a significant role in its multicultural identity and international engagement. Cypriot society is deeply rooted in traditions that have evolved over centuries, reflecting the island's rich history and diverse cultural influences. Family holds a central place in Cypriot life, with extended families often living in close proximity and playing a vital role in social support networks. Traditional celebrations and gatherings, such as weddings and religious festivals, are elaborate affairs, marked by music, dance, and sumptuous feasts. Moreover, the warm and friendly nature of Cypriots is evident in their love for socialising, where food and conversation flow freely. In Cyprus, the blend of tradition, family, and conviviality creates a unique and vibrant societal fabric. The importance of social gatherings emerges from the unity of people due to relationships (families), common interests (friends), community sharing, political affiliations (or lack thereof), historical references and experiences.

Cyprus, like many other countries, faces a range of social issues that impact its society. Among the prominent social issues in Cyprus is the Cyprus Problem; the ongoing division of Cyprus carries significant social and political implications. As of today, social issues stemming from the Cyprus problem persist, maintaining a sense of division between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The physical separation of the island continues to limit meaningful interactions, hindering reconciliation efforts. Disputes over property rights and the return of refugees remain unresolved, and the issue of missing persons from the 1974 conflict continues to weigh heavily on affected families. The existence of separate educational systems, distinct cultural narratives taught on each side of the divide, and the substantial influence of the two religions further perpetuate social divisions.

In addition, the economic inequality; Despite its economic development, Cyprus has faced issues related to income inequality. The gap between the wealthy and the economically disadvantaged is a concern, particularly in urban areas. Gender inequality remains pervasive, manifesting in various forms of gender-based discrimination and disparities in Cypriot society, encompassing wage disparities and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Also, education holds significant importance within the society. While Cyprus has a well-developed education system, there are concerns about the quality of education, especially in rural areas. Access to higher education can pose challenges for certain groups of the population.

Additionally, frequent occurrences of racist behaviour towards people from other countries along with incidents of bullying, primarily targeting individuals' characteristics, are often observed. This is a problem that needs to be eradicated by educating children from a young age to embrace diversity. Lastly, the topic of mental health is of paramount importance. There is a growing awareness of mental health issues, underscoring the necessity for enhanced mental healthcare services and a reduction in the stigmatisation surrounding mental well-being.

Cyprus's culture is distinctly divided between its northern Turkish and southern Greek regions. Despite past conflicts, the younger generation of Greek Cypriots has grown up in a peaceful, prosperous society that blends traditional elements with global trends in fashion and entertainment, influenced by mass media and an influx of young travellers. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots share a rich tradition of handicrafts, including renowned Cypriot lacework and widespread silversmithing. Cyprus's culinary heritage reflects influences from the Levant, Anatolia, and Greece, with unique dishes with a history dating back thousands of years.

2. Historical background on the political participation of women in Cyprus

2.1 Evolution of the status of women in the Cypriot context

1930s: In the 1930s, a state of absolute male dominance prevailed. Women were subjected to oppression in both public and private spheres, effectively limiting their access to various opportunities. Women were primarily viewed as instruments for men's sexual pleasure and "reproduction machines" whilst being regarded as men's possessions. Girls learned from an early age to prioritise marriage as the ultimate goal of their lives. Within the family hierarchy, men often believed they held the authority to humiliate or physically harm. Even in social settings like dining or religious places, men and women were segregated. Women were prohibited from wearing pants, smoking, driving cars or tractors, and despite their involvement in agricultural work, control over finances remained in the hands of husbands or fathers. Only a small number of women had access to secondary education and lacked any involvement in public affairs or the right to vote. This dependence on men was deeply embedded in the societal perception of women, closely tied to traditional religious beliefs that required women to exhibit morality, loyalty, and submission to their husbands. Consequently, these cultural understandings significantly influenced the education provided to girls in the Cypriot society and the extent of schooling reasoned appropriate for them.

1950s: In the 1950s, only affluent families had the means to provide education for their daughters, and if there were sons in the family, they were given priority, enjoying the benefits of higher education, better job prospects, and opportunities for international travel. Gender disparities were significant terms of opportunities for men and women. Socialisation and education were gender-specific, extending it to school curricula. Class structure influenced the roles and educational opportunities available for women. For instance, in urban settings, women were expected to excel as devoted wives and mothers, often discontinuing their careers after marriage to fully embrace their roles as spouses and mothers. In rural areas, women were not only responsible for the household and family care but also actively engaged in agricultural labour and farming, effectively shouldering a dual workload compared to male workers. Working-class women played a central role in family production and sustaining household needs.

1960s: In the 1960s, women from the lower-middle class often pursued home-based occupations such as dressmaking, embroidery, weaving, or crafting, allowing them to generate income and attain a sense of "controlled independence." Upon the establishment of the republic in 1960, Cypriot women were granted the right to vote as outlined in the constitution. Consequently, Cypriot women could actively engage in a process of political mobilisation and heighten gender awareness. This newfound right, empowered women to have a say in family matters and actively participate in decision-making processes.

Mid 1960s-1980s: As part of the processes of democratisation, modernisation, and urbanisation, Cyprus gradually introduced compulsory primary education and extended secondary education up to the age of 15 for both boys and girls. The democratisation of education expanded progressively, resulting in co-educational schools (boys and girls educated together). Nevertheless, it's important to note that textbooks continued to perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforcing distinct activities for girls and boys. During these periods, there was a steady rise in the participation of Cypriot women in the workforce. As the capitalist economy was rising, girls received more education compared to their mothers and grandmothers. Women began to assert themselves in family affairs, particularly in urban areas. While women started working in paid jobs outside home, the prevailing patriarchal ideology placed them in what can be described as 'double-bind roles' ; In addition to their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, they were now expected to function as labourers, maintain attractiveness and appeal for men's satisfaction, and financially support their families. This transition marked a more active role and involvement of women in political and public life, although this transformation was still in the process of development.

2.2 Women's movement

In the mid-20th century (1930-1960) a structured women's movement began to emerge. Women in Cyprus began to form organised groups in the 1930s, establishing these groups within the existing political associations. The Progressive Women's Organisations is laying the foundation for the first women's organisation on the island. The Pancyprian Organisation of Democratic Women (PODG), which originated within AKEL in 1950, is often recognised as the first feminist women's organisation in Cyprus. The Pancypriot Organisation of Democratic Women (PODG) was established to bring together scattered progressive women's groups and coordinate their efforts on a nationwide level. PODG upholds values such as freedom, democracy, peace, and gender equality, actively working to educate women in alignment with these principles. Its primary objective is enlightening, awakening, and mobilising women in the collective political struggle for self-determination and the assertion of equal rights.

In 1959, the Pancypriot Federation of Women's Organisations (POGO) was founded through a large conference attended by 1500 delegates, organised at the behest of PODG executives and with participation from women representing diverse societal backgrounds. POGO affirmed its commitment to combatting social injustices and promoting gender equality, particularly in the aftermath of colonialism's enduring legacy of economic, social, and cultural underdevelopment. POGO's aim is to establish a cohesive, widespread women's movement that articulates the desires, pursuits, and aspirations of contemporary women. Similar women organisations were further established, originating from other political parties. (GO-DISY: *GINAIKEIA ORGANOSI DIMOKRATIKOY SYNAGERMOY GO.DI.SY*)

2.3 Gender Equality Commissioner

Article 28 of the Cypriot Constitution of 1960 establishes the principle of equal treatment and prohibits any form of direct or indirect discrimination based on gender. In Cyprus, the pursuit of gender equality through policy and legislation is a relatively recent development.

The Gender Equality Commissioner (GEC) was established in 2014, and the Commissioner carries out duties and responsibilities delegated by the President of the Republic, to whom the Commissioner is accountable. The primary mission of the Commissioner is to advance gender equality and eradicate discrimination against women. Currently, Jojie Christodoulou is the Commissioner for Gender Equality on March 2023, appointed by the President of the Republic, in March 2023.

In February 1994, the Council of Ministers established the National Mechanism for Women's Rights with the aim of advancing women's equality and safeguarding their rights across various aspects of life. On March 8th, 2023, the Council of Ministers determined that the Commissioner for Gender Equality will continue to chair her position as the chair of the National Mechanism for Women's Rights (NWRM). Following that, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2024-2026 was discussed between March -July 2023, underscoring Cyprus's commitment to promoting women's rights and gender equality.

2.4. Timeline of Greek-Cypriot women placed for the first time in leading positions within the political sphere

1926 – Katina Nikolaou	The first woman who participated in a party organisation was at the founding congress of the Communist Party of Cyprus, which was secretly organised.
1944 – Fofo Vasileiou	The first woman to be elected to a party position was in the Central Committee of AKEL during the 3rd congress held in Larnaca.
1960 – Kallistheni Maouni	The first woman who attempted to run for candidacy for the newly established House of Representatives in the Limassol district. She ultimately had to withdraw her candidacy "to avoid" an electoral scandal.
1960 – Constantina Varda	The first Greek Cypriot woman to be elected to an elective state position was in the Greek Community Assembly, without a vote.
1960 – Stella Soulioti	The first woman Minister of the Republic of Cyprus was appointed by President Makarios as the Minister of Justice.
1970 – Toulla Charalambous	The first Greek Cypriot woman who ran for candidacy for the House of Representatives in Larnaca with the Progressive Party.
1979 – Loulla Chrysostomou	The first woman member of a community council, she was elected without a vote in Pervolia with AKEL.
1979 – Eva Hadjikoymi	The first woman member of the Development Council. She was elected without a vote in Deryneia with AKEL.
1981 – Rina Katselli	The first Greek Cypriot woman to be elected as a member of the House of Representatives. She was elected in Kyrenia with DIKO (Democratic Party).
1984 – Thelma Ioannidou	The first woman village leader, she was appointed in the parish of Agios Antonios, Nicosia.
1992 – Elli Leptou	The first woman Mayor. She assumed office as the Mayor of Kyrenia through a cross-party agreement without elections.
2006 – Antigoni Papadopoulou	The first woman serving as Chair in the House's Committee of Economic Affairs and Budgeting.

2006- Eleni Mavrou	The first woman Mayor of Nicosia
2008 – Androulla Vasileiou	The first Cypriot woman member of the European Commission.
2009 – Eleni Theocharous and Antigoni Papadopoulou	The first women members of the European Parliament.
2009 – Ioanna Panayiotou	The first woman leader of a parliamentary party, she was elected as the General Secretary of the Ecological Movement.
2021 – Annita Demetriou	The first woman president of House of Representatives.
March 2023 - Annita Demetriou	The first woman president of a major political party and the first woman president of the Democratic Rally (DISY).

Annita Demetriou's dual role represents a recent milestone in women attaining prominent positions for the first time in history. While this achievement signifies progress toward gender equality and acknowledges women's competence within the political sphere, it is unfortunate that her external appearance received more attention than the significance of her role. This underscores the fact that women in politics often face expectations regarding their choice of clothes and behaviour, which are sometimes reinforced by public opinion influenced by the media. Women's roles are often defined, comprehended and thus constrained by societal expectations, underscoring the enduring control of gender stereotypes.

3. Current statistics about women's political participation

3.1. EU Level

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has designed the Gender Equality Index (GEI) as a tool for gauging gender equality within the European Union. This index relies on a collection of indicators assessing gender equality across seven key domains, encompassing areas such as employment, financial matters, education, time allocation, decision-making authority, health, and incidents of violence.

Cyprus ranks **22nd in the EU on the Gender Equality Index** with 57.3 out of 100 points, for 2022. Cyprus achieves its highest scores in the money domain, attaining a rating of 83.1 points. Cyprus's **biggest improvement** has been in the domain of knowledge, with a score of 57.8 points, which is the largest increase among all Member States.



For more information on the different EIGE indicators for Cyprus, visit: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/country/CY>

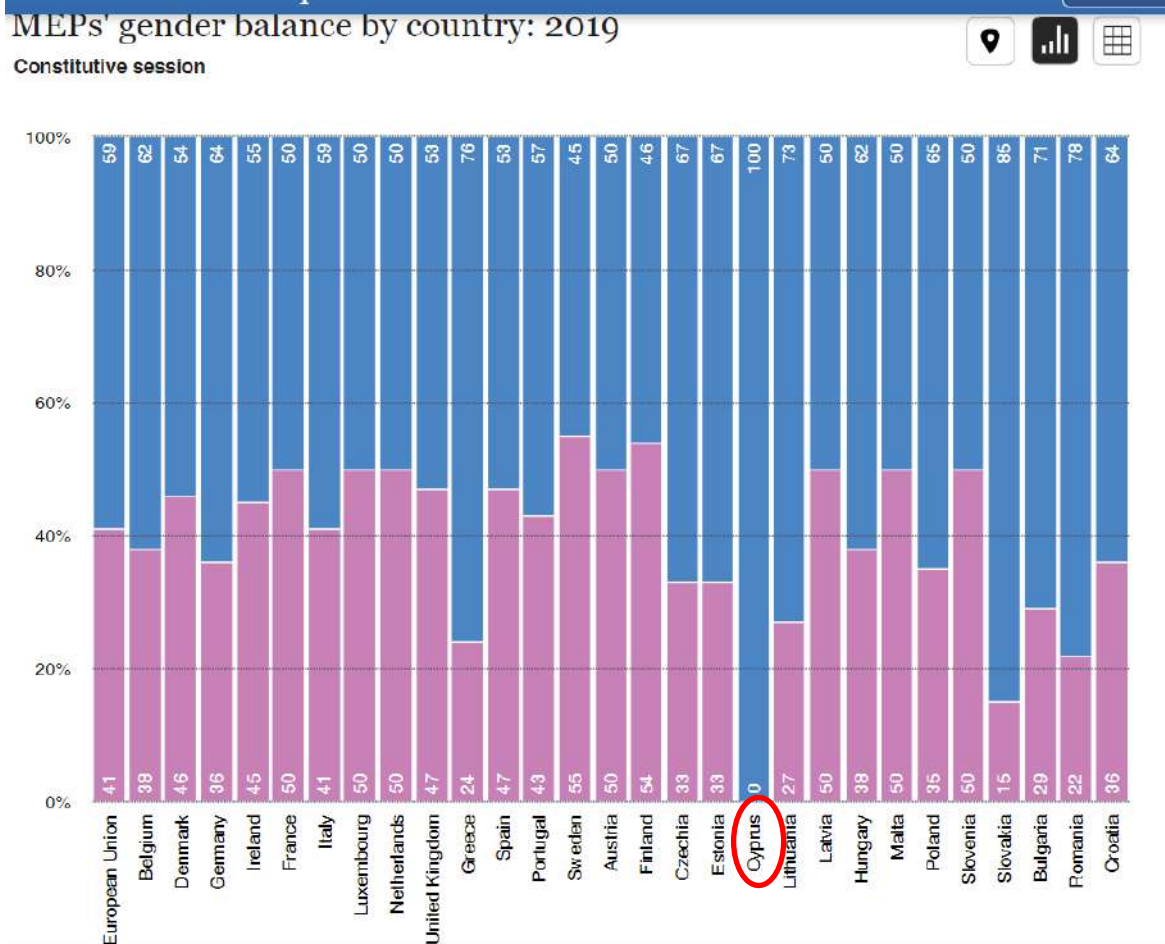
In the realm of **political power**, Cyprus achieved a score of 34.6. Women held 25% of ministerial positions, which was **below the EU average of 33.4%**. In addition, women representation in the parliament was 14.3%, falling short of the EU average of 33%. Furthermore, it's worth noting that women constituted 15.3% of members in regional assemblies, **lagging behind the EU average of 29.4%**.

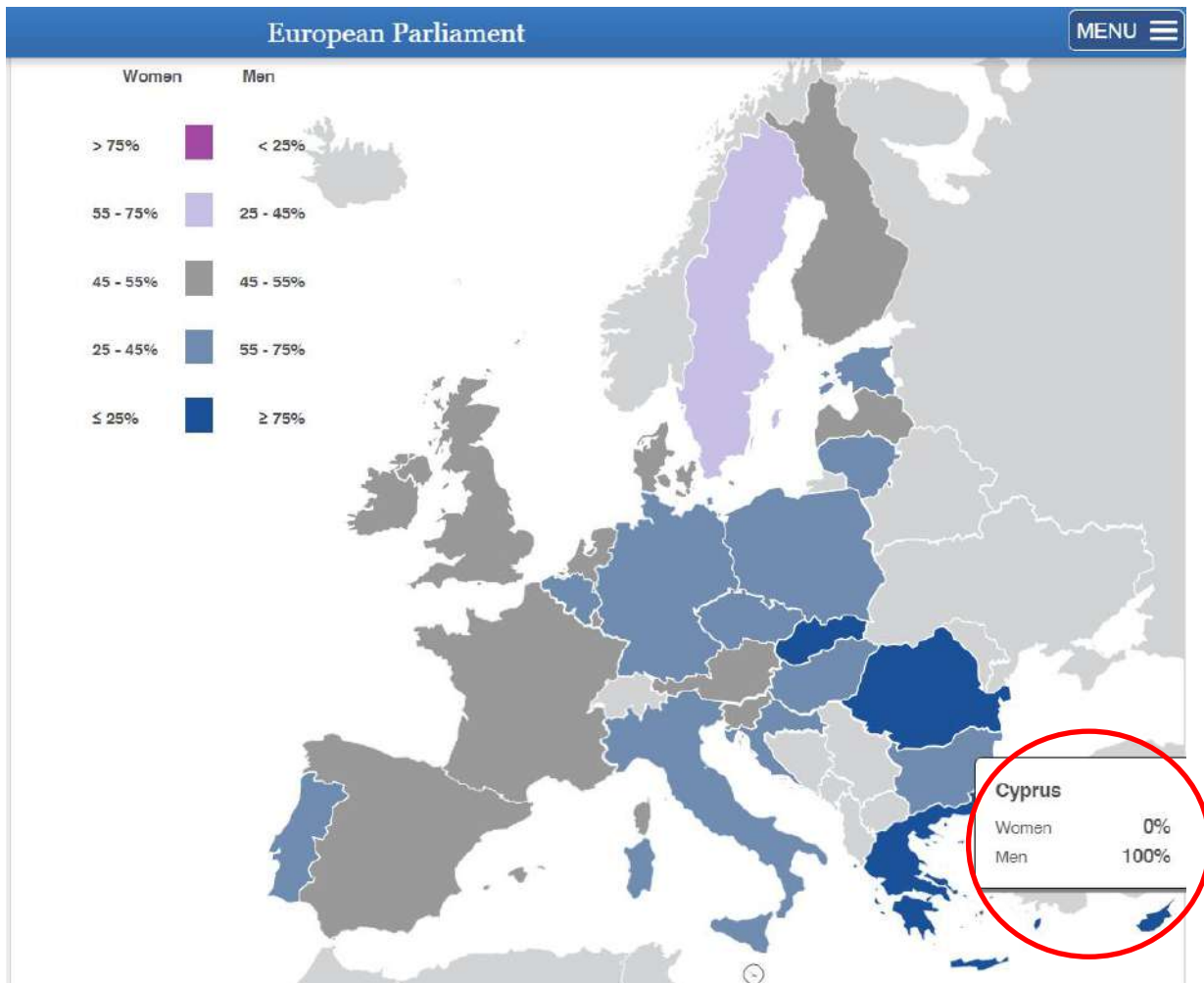
In terms of **economic power**, Cyprus received a score of 22.8. Women's representation in board positions of the largest quoted companies was **only 9.8%**, compared to an EU average

of 31.6%. Additionally, the proportion of women serving as board members in the central bank is 12.5%, significantly **trailing behind the EU average of 26.4%**.

In the realm of **social power**, Cyprus achieved a score of 34.6. Women accounted for 22.2% of board members in research funding organisations, which notably **lower the EU average of 40.3%**. Additionally, their representation in board positions in publicly owned broadcasting organisations was considerably lower at 22.2%, **falling short of the EU average of 36.5%**. Moreover, in the highest decision-making body of national Olympic sport organisations, women constituted only 9.7% of members, **a figure that remains a lot below the EU average of 20.2%**.

Overall, Cyprus faces significant gender disparities across various dimensions of power. In the political sphere, women's representation in ministerial positions and parliament lags behind the EU averages, with a notable shortfall in regional assemblies. Economically, women hold notably fewer board positions in major companies and the central bank compared to EU standards. In terms of social influence, their presence in research funding organisations, publicly owned broadcasting, and national Olympic sport organisations remains below European averages. Addressing these disparities is crucial to achieving greater gender equality and empowerment in Cyprus.





Both statistical representations were identified from:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/mep-gender-balance/2019-2024/>

In the European Parliament, for the current term, Cyprus had not elected any women as 6 men were elected. This year Eleni Stavrou **replaced** the position of Lefteris Christoforou (DISY MEP) who vacated the position, due to his nomination for a role in the European Court of Auditors. Cyprus is the only country within the European Union that had no women representation in the European Parliament, reaching the 0% of women representation.

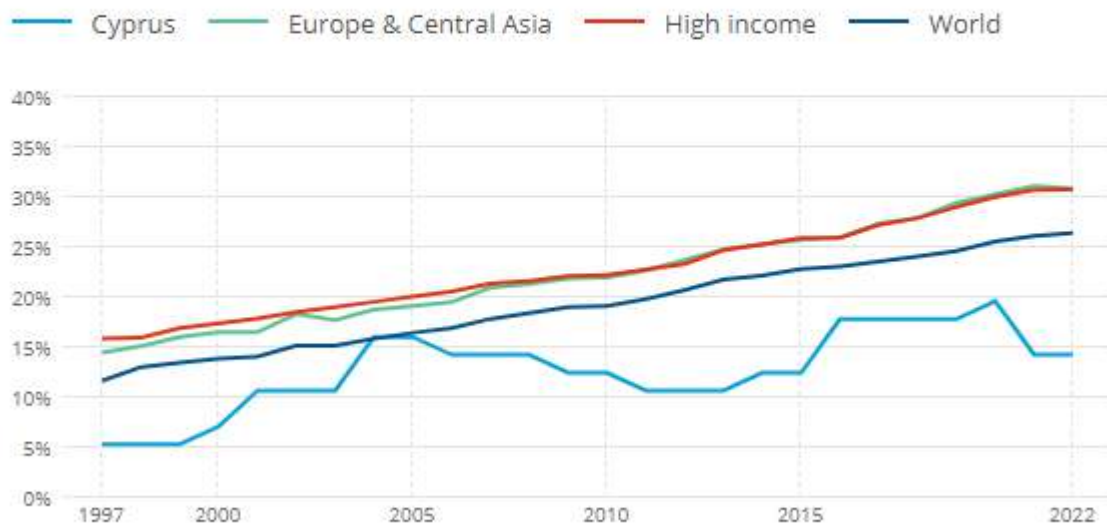
Cyprus' historical lack of women representation in the European Parliament stands out as a stark contrast to the broader European Union's commitment to gender equality and diversity. While a notable change occurred this year with Eleni Stavrou's appointment, due to a replacement and not elected, it underscores the pressing need for more substantial efforts to ensure equal gender representation in Cyprus's European Parliament delegation, aligning with the principles of inclusivity championed by the EU.

3.2. National Level

Currently, on a national level, the council of Ministers Compositions of the Republic of Cyprus, consists of: 11 Ministers, 6 Deputy Ministers, 1 Government Spokesman, 1 Deputy Government Spokesman and 1 Secretary/Council minister. A total of 9 women are position within the council of Ministers Compositions. Specifically, 3/11 Ministers are women, 4/6 Deputy Ministers are women, the Deputy Government Spokesman a well as the Secretary/Council; minister are women.

Regarding the Parliament: The percentage of seats occupied by women in Cyprus has remained relatively consistent since 2010 and currently falls below the average for high-income nations.

Seats held by women in national parliaments, female (%)



The statistical representation was identified from:

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/cyprus/#:~:text=In%20Cyprus%2C%20the%20labor%20force,labor%20force%20participation%20has%20increased>

Out of the 56 seats in the parliament, only 8 seats were women secured, accounting for an approximately 14% (14.3%) representation, which was decreased from the 17% in 2016. However, the percentage increased to 21.4%, corresponding to 12 women, following reshuffles a year later.

Regarding Municipalities: The Republic of Cyprus consists of a total 36 Municipalities. Out of these 36 Municipalities, only 3 Mayors are women. Specifically, within the region of Nicosia, 12 Municipalities are identified, only 1 Mayor is a woman. In the region of Limassol, 6 Municipalities are identified, none of the Mayors is a woman. This is also identified in the region of Larnaca. In the region of Famagusta, 8 Municipalities are identified, only 2 Mayors are women, reaching the highest number in accordance with regions. Lastly, in the region of Paphos, 4 Municipalities are identified, none of them is a woman.

Regarding the Community Presidents: The Republic of Cyprus consist of a total of 349 village communities. Out of these 349, only 28 community leaders are women. Specifically, within the region of Nicosia, 94 village communities are identified, only 6 community leaders are women. In the region of Limassol, 104 village communities are identified, only 4 community leaders are women. In the region of Larnaca, 45 village communities are identified, only 6 community leaders are women. In the region of Paphos, 101 village communities are identified and only 12 community leaders are women, reaching the highest number in accordance with village communities. Lasty, in the region of Famagusta, 5 village communities are identified and none of the community leaders is a woman.

In the Republic of Cyprus, while there is some representation of women in positions of political leadership at the national level, there remains a substantial gender disparity in local governance. Although progress is evident with women occupying various roles within the Council of Ministers. The underrepresentation of women in mayoral and community leadership positions across municipalities and villages highlights the need for greater gender diversity and inclusivity at the grassroots level of governance.

Cyprus continues to grapple with a persistent gender imbalance in its parliamentary representation as well, with women holding a consistently lower percentage of seats compared to high-income nations. While there has been an improvement in women representation through subsequent reshuffles, further efforts are essential to achieve a more equitable and inclusive political landscape.

4. Focus group to explore barriers and strategies regarding the political participation of women

4.1 Objectives of the focus group

Based on partner knowledge and initial desk research, the FEM-ABLE project identified a set of obstacles and barriers that might explain the reasons why women participate less in politics, and when they do, why they are chosen less than men candidates. Namely:

1. **Gender bias:** there may be conscious or unconscious bias against women in politics and leadership roles, making it more difficult for them to be taken seriously or gain access to opportunities.
2. **Stereotyping:** women may be stereotyped as being less competent or less ambitious than men, which can discourage them from pursuing leadership roles.
3. **Lack of role models:** when there are few women in leadership positions, it can be difficult for other women to envision themselves in those roles.
4. **Double standards:** women may face higher expectations and scrutiny than men when it comes to their behaviour and performance in leadership roles.
5. **Work-life balance:** women may feel that the demands of political or leadership roles would make it difficult to balance their work and family responsibilities
6. **Glass ceiling and wage gap in political careers of women:** systemic barriers that prevent women from reaching higher positions and receiving equal pay as their men counterparts in the political field, such as preferential treatment, sexism, harassment and hostile work environment, limited networking opportunities (as many times these happen “after-hours”), lack of family-friendly policies, and lack of adequate promotion policies.
7. **Traditional assignment of administrative role to women within political organisations:** given the pervasiveness of gender roles within political organisations, women tend to take on tasks more related to administration, logistics, resource and team management, rather than more visible and directive roles focused on decision-making and on informing such decisions to staff and voter base. The reasons why women are underrepresented in politics and leadership roles are complex and multifaceted. By conducting focus groups and interviews with women who have been active-

currently or in the past-with politic, we aimed to explore specific challenges that women face when attempting to break through these barriers and succeed in the traditionally men-dominated field of politics.

As such, ***the objective of the focus group was to explore further the pre-defined objectives, in order to be validated or rejected, whilst identifying additional barriers and proposing strategies in order to address the barriers stated. The voice, experience and testimonies of women, identified in the national political field of Cyprus, shed light to the challenges and opportunities of a political career.***

4.2 Participants and structure of the focus group and interviews conducted

The field research was conducted using focus groups and individual interviews (face to face and in a written form). Due to the complex and busy schedule of the women participants who have expressed their willingness to participate to the data collection process, a lot of individual focus groups had to be organised. Specifically, one focus group was organised and conducted with two participants, three individual interviews were conducted, and four written interviews were collected-due to complexities in finding available dates and time. All interviews were conducted and collected between **April 2023 and May 2023**, and they all lasted for one hour approximately. The focus group and the face-to-face interviews were conducted in our offices in Nicosia and one interview was conducted in the office of the participant in Larnaca. The structure of all sessions was as follows:

- Welcoming with coffee explanation of the consent form and signing the consent form
- Introduction of the researcher, the organisation representing, the project and its purpose.
- Discussion for validation, focused on the hypotheses identified by the consortium.
- Discussion focused on barriers for the participation of women in politics.
- Discussion focused on strategies for the participation of women in politics.
- Ending the session

The total number of participants was eight women who are currently actively participating in politics or were participating in the past. Participants included:

- Activists
- Volunteers
 - being in charge of volunteering sections, in NGOs associations for social equality and for supporting vulnerable groups.
- Past parliamentary election candidates
 - MEP candidates in 2019.
 - Parliamentary candidate during the last parliamentary elections of 2021.

- Former member of the city council, members of political parties and active members of NGOs promoting empowerment and leadership to women.
- vice presidents of political parties
- provincial secretary of a specific party District Organisation, members of the Political Bureau at Local Clubs-first woman to be elected.

Participants were selected assuring diversity in age, background, being mothers, marital status and most importantly in parties' representation.

Participants included members from the following parties:

- AKEL [Progressive Party of Working People]
- DEPA [Democratic Alignment]
- DIKO [Democratic Party]
- DISY [Democratic Rally]
- Ecologist Greens

The session was organised, lead and facilitated by the Project Manager responsible for the FEM-ABLE project in Cyprus, Paschalia Leventi, representing CSI-Center for Social Innovation.

The responses of all 8 participants were divided in regards to thematic areas, following the questions of the interview guide the consortium followed to conduct the interviews and focus groups.

4.3. Questions to validate hypothesis

4.3.1. Gender bias and stereotypes:

Regarding the question 'in what ways do you think gender bias or stereotypes might impact the political careers or aspirations of women?', a variety of points were expressed by the participants, identifying these as significant barriers to women's participation in the political domain. Participants referred to the format of a **patriarchal society** and the **traditional role of a woman**; stay at home. Deconstructing further the definition of a woman's role, **motherhood** was also expressed by a participant; women are responsible to stay home taking care of the children. Participants also commented that, unfortunately such interpretations of women's role still exist and are still considered as the norm in today's society; there is no improvement in such interpretations that start from the families and the ways children are raised; "*Mums are not only there to stay at home*". This is further identified in the field of politics, as most the participants identified that politics in Cyprus is **male dominated**; there is no room for women to prove what they can do as this is not "*an appropriate type of work for a woman*" where she can actively participate in. Additionally, it was

commonly identified that most of the participants have received **sexist comments** and comments about their **appearance**, revealing the implicit stereotypes of women being unable to hold such positions due to their gender and thus further contributing to the social notion, as a product of patriarchy, that women are primarily valued for their physical appearance.

Therefore, **societal expectation** resulting to gender bias and **internalised beliefs** about gender roles, may have as a further consequence for women to doubt their abilities, hesitate to assert themselves, or underestimate their own potential in the political arena. This justifies the reason why most of the participants referred to that at the end of the day we are talking about an individualistic approach that a woman should adopt to build her own strength and pass by any comments that have as an aim to let her down; **“Women need to constantly prove themselves”**. Concluding on their remarks, some participants identified there is improvement in women’s representation in the political sphere, but there is still a long road to cover yet.

“Women need to constantly prove themselves”.

4.3.2. Role Models:

Participants were asked about whether the presence or absence of women role models in politics influences the career choices or motivations of women interested in pursuing a political career. Focusing on the identification of the presence or absence of role models, there were major differences as from those who focused on the presence or absence of role models, there were responses who identified their presence and there were responses who identified their absence. Specifically, a participant stated that **“there are women role models, they always existed but not in key positions. I was influenced by some of these women from the 30s who managed to contribute to the society whilst taking care of their families. These women were in the front line for gaining the rights in employment, in receiving salaries, in voting”**. On the other hand, another participant stated that the **“there are not a lot of women role models, there are some who stand out in politics”**. These interpretations reveal the historical and political influence of the participants’ career and life, showing their overall understanding of the presence or absence of role models. Participants expanded further stating the need to develop women role models that are not formed based on the stereotypical interpretations of a society in order to be accepted by the society, be projected and be elected. In that way the representation of women will increase whilst enriching the historical timeline with women role models. This further explains the inputs of the participants who stated the importance and the need of having women role models; The presence of women role models in politics inspires and motivates other women, challenging gender stereotypes, empowering the break of perception that politics is a male-dominated field and foster a sense of belonging, ultimately encouraging women to pursue their own political aspirations. Similarly, a participant expanded further on this idea stating that the current presence of women in politics will be the ones becoming role models for future generations; **“we are experiencing a transition phase”**. This

feeling along with the individual responsibility of each woman in politics, reveal the huge burden of changing the traditional and patriarchal norms around the interpretation of women in society and more specifically in politics. Thus, having **women role models in politics can motivate younger generations** to be interested and engaged in politics, whilst marking a decisive shift of both the role of women in a society as well as women's representation in politics. Lastly, one participant further questioned the overall idea of 'women role models', noted that there is a positive effect in having women role models in politics, as it helps in deconstructing some perceptions on whether women are capable of holding this kind of positions. However, the participant expanded beyond the idea of having women role models, stating that ***"the problem of women participation in politics is not the lack of role models but lays deeper in society that lacks equality"***, expressing that the participation of women extends beyond the presence of role models and is rooted in deeper societal factors and gender inequality. **While having women role models is important, it alone cannot address the barriers and challenges faced by women in politics.**

"The problem of women participation in politics is not the lack of role models but lays deeper in society that lacks equality".

4.3.3. Double Standards and scrutiny:

The next question asked to the participants was based on whether women in politics are held to different standards or face more scrutiny than their men counterparts. They were also asked to provide examples. ***"All women entering the field of politics and projected publicly will receive comments about their appearance; focusing on how they looked like and not on what they stated, whilst women try to come up with a justification. Women in politics will be judged about their clothing whilst a man in the same position will not be judged about his clothing."*** The need for this automatic and unconscious justifications results from social expectations, considered as the normality. It seems unacceptable to be exposed out to the public without following the social norms. Similar comments in regards to comparison with male colleagues were also stated by other participants; Women may be subjected to harsher judgment regarding their appearance, sensitivity demeanour, or personal life, while male politicians are often evaluated primarily based on their qualifications and policies. Comments around physical appearance and personal life were also mentioned by some women. Due to these comments, ***"women will be judged harsher just because they choose to follow such career"***. All these comments result to the idea that women need to work more and harder from their male colleagues in order to prove that they are justifiably positioned there and can respond to needs of their position. ***"I also observed that it is expected from a woman in politics to prove that she is not only equal to a man in politics, but that she is even better so as to deserve to be there. If she fails to be successful, it is not only a personal loss but is also regarded as a loss for all women. In many cases she will not be judged as an individual, but collectively as a representative of her gender"***. In the case of reference to specific examples, again participants stated information about their male colleagues; There are cases where male politicians choose to

attack on a woman personally rather than engaging in the political debate. **“Recently, there was an incident when a male politician chose to refer to her as “a woman shouting” instead of replying to her political arguments”**. Such examples reveal the existence heightened scrutiny faced by women in politics. The incident demonstrates how the male politician's derogatory comment, specifically targeting women's gender and dismissing arguments. **Responses reflects a double standard in which women's behaviour is disproportionately scrutinised and devalued where their qualifications and political arguments may be overshadowed by gendered critiques and stereotypes.**

“...she will not be judged as an individual, but collectively as a representative of her gender”.

4.3.4. Work Life balance:

The next question had to do with the challenges women might face when balancing work and family responsibilities while pursuing a political career. All participants expressed similar interpretations; focusing on family's perceptions and support systems as well as the education system that reinforces the traditional role of a woman. According to a participant, it is more difficult for a woman to balance work and family responsibilities as women are **expected to take care of themselves, their family and at the same time be present and excel in their activities as politician** and thus difficult to have a steady schedule to manage all these things. This was also commonly identified in other testimonials stating that women in politics need to well-combine the **triptych of taking care of herself, being a mother and a successful careerist-in this case, politician**. Furthermore, again a **comparison with male colleagues** was mentioned; a married man with children, can more easily leave his wife at home to take care of the house and the children while he attends the events etc. Another participant stated that women politicians are often questioned about their ability to balance family responsibilities with their political careers, whereas male politicians are not subjected to the same level of scrutiny. Additionally, participants revealed the **difficulties of their families accepting their career choice**; some participants revealed that the husbands' non-acceptance of the career path of the participants that would mean having more responsibilities in the house and in regards to their children, resulted to a divorce. Another participant revealed the same idea, where her husband showed understanding after a lot of difficulties in order for him to understand her political career and thus responsibilities. In accordance with this, she revealed an example where her son was not confident in writing in school essays that his father was cooking for them. This was further explained in regards to the **education system** of the country, going back to the continuation of the traditional gender roles. This was also identified by another participant who stated that the education and childcare system in our country are major obstacles to finding the required balance between family life and professional life. Other participants also revealed the **lack of support infrastructures** for a woman as well as the **limited support system in regards to childcare**. The lack of such infrastructures for a woman who wants to reconcile career, family and

personal life, further reveal the limited opportunities for women to seek career in politics and balance work and family responsibilities. All these cause further challenges and expectations for women in politics, as they are forced to navigate societal expectations around gender roles and caregiving responsibilities resulting to **question themselves about their ability to balance family responsibilities with their political careers**. As a result, women may choose between career and having children. Consequently, we end up talking about the structure of the well combined triptych referred above as there is often more pressure in women in taking care of the children, fact which makes balancing work, taking care of herself as a woman and family responsibilities more challenging for a woman. As a result, in order to combine all these three elements together and complete them successfully, **the woman who chooses such career needs to find the perfect balance between these**.

4.3.5. Hostile environment:

For the question regarding systemic barriers, such as preferential treatment, hostile work environments (sexism, discrimination, etc.), or wage differences for similar responsibilities, which might limit the career progression of women in politics, participants commented on the hostile work environments and wage differences. Firstly, no wage difference experiences were revealed by any participant. A participant stated that there is somewhat of a hostile work environment in some cases, in the sense that some men will exhibit sexism (mostly in times where they lack or have inadequate arguments to support a position or feel inadequate in a discussion). Some may even go as far as making sexual advances to women or trying to promote women in politics in exchange for a sexual relationship. Other participants have also referred to sexism as a barrier that may limit the political career progression of a woman, both due to gender as well as age. Discussing further, it was stated that, even if a man tries to support or promote a woman for pure, objective reasons because he believes in her abilities, he is also likely to be accused of having ulterior motives and again the woman will be the subject of gossip, limiting her progression or creating doubts as to whether she deserved the progression or not. **“Sexism is inevitable”**. All these reflect the idea that due to being a woman alone, can further result to systemic barriers. Expanding it further, some participants stated that they have experienced hostile attitudes from women and not from men. Women are more competitive towards each other; a woman is more likely to compete against and to criticise another woman. Only by the fact that she didn't want/ couldn't/ was unable to choose and pursue a successful career in politics. In this way the women sabotage themselves. **“By nature, we are more sensitive”**, a participant stated, and due to this sensitivity, it is 'easier' to receive sexist comments, as they directly address these sensitivities, and are often directly interlinked with motherhood. Adding to that, a participant explained that women do not want to be criticised as such criticisms-that attack their sensitivity- push her backwards. Another participant stated that, **“they believe that the primary role of a woman is being a mum, but the primary role of a woman is being a woman”**. Expanding this further she stated that they need to feel good so that their

children feel good and be able to teach them Ideals, values of self-respect, self-esteem, solidarity. **Thus, all these comments result to the barriers women in politics phase whilst finding the strength, and if possible, the support, to ignore them and move on doing your job.**

“Sexism is inevitable”.

4.3.6. Administrative vs decision-making roles:

For the question asked whether women are more likely to take on administrative or supportive roles instead of decision-making positions and how this will impact women's overall representation in politics, all participants agreed that women tend to take administrative roles by the fact that they are women. This phenomenon, often referred to as the ‘glass cliff’ or ‘sticky floor’, and of course has a negative impact on women’s overall representation in politics, as participants stated. As participants stated, men are always in decision-making roles, and if women are in decision-making roles they are criticised even more. A participant stated further that, **“we want women to get in decision-making roles because they will be best suited, and we are fighting to get women in decision-making roles”**. There is an overall effort to propose and promote women for leading positions in party organisations, and deny any doubts raised. **“They are able to take decision-making roles but they still receive administrative ones”**. The interpretation of a participant, expanded on the idea that the main issue is not the separation between administrative or decision-making positions but the overall participation of women in these organisations, which is lower, compared to men. **All these comments again show the overall low representation of women in politics whilst those women who are in politics get administrative and supportive roles, due to their gender. Such representations truly impact the overall women representation in politics.**

“...and we are fighting to get women in decision-making roles”.

4.4. Questions for the focus group to identify additional barriers

4.4.1. Specific challenges and barriers:

Proceeding on to the second set of questions, participants had to share any other additional challenges. Most of the participants didn’t have any additional barriers to mention as they were mentioned during the previous questions. A participant revealed the **further expansion of social attitudes**, that were fundamentally followed by her family when she was growing up, resulting to be determinative about her future. As she revealed, she didn’t attend university because a woman had to stay at home. Her career path and all the social obligations that followed were harshly and strongly criticised by her mother. Additional barriers referred to **nationality** and **age**; for nationality,

the participant referred to the doubts received by the public for choosing to be a parliamentary candidate, commenting further on the difficulties she would face in regards to the Greek language and that she shouldn't get a position in the parliament due to the nationality of her family (not originating from Cyprus or Greece).. This can be further expanded to the perception of **racism**, showing that, even if she has the same human and civil rights as Greek-Cypriot people, they were neglected, and focus was on the idea that her eligibility for a parliamentary role was undermined due to her family's nationality. Most of the participants referred to the idea of **age**; the combination of being young and choosing politics can result to a lot of comments that can be understood to be sexist, provocative as well as insulting according to what participants have reported. eg. *"I will vote for you because you are beautiful", "I will listen to you because you are young", "What do you know, so young"*, etc. The combination of age and career choice was further analysed; A young woman is perceived as more 'sensitive' and less 'mature' thus more likely to be perceived as not capable to do a 'good job'; *"I became a vice president of a political party at a young age. It became harder for me to pass my views and opinions and I had to try harder to be taken seriously and be treated with respect"*. She is seen as a more vulnerable 'target' for discrimination. *"...I had to argue with a security man to let me pass in the VIP section...because he would not believe that I was a vice president of a political party!"*. **It is evident that women in politics phase multiple, multifaceted and multilayered challenges and discriminations, stemming from deep-rooted biases, systemic barriers, and societal expectations resulting to hinder further women's full and equal participation in the political sphere.**

4.4.2. Societal attitudes and cultural norms:

For the question societal attitudes or cultural norms impacting women's participation in politics, all women participants identified the idea of the traditional gender roles, that are strongly rooted in Cyprus and still adopted in the modern society. Participants expressed that, societal attitudes or cultural norms often assign women to **domestic and caregiving roles**, while associating men with leadership and decision-making. These stereotypes can create barriers for women who aspire to enter politics, as they **may face resistance or limited support due to societal expectations**. Women are expected to have their families as their main and only priorities and that men are more 'fit' to be politicians than women. This deters women. Also, it was stated that there is a tendency not to vote for women because if women are elected, **they will not have as much time available as men to achieve accomplishments**. All these stereotypes and perceptions around the role of a woman as well as the roles of each profession, are well rooted in the overall effort in trying to understand the society and the role each individual has. Participants stated that, if no dramatic changes occur and if no women are elected, the societal attitudes and norms will not be shifted. As a concluding remark, participants agreed that for this to occur, **there is still a long way to go; we have moved forward, but that still there are a lot of uphill steps that need to be taken.**

4.4.3. Media influence:

Regarding the question about the role of the media play in shaping the public's perception of women in leadership positions, a plethora of perceptions was expressed, whilst marking similarities and differences. A number of participants expressed that **“the role of media is determinant; they shape awareness”**. Media has the **power to shape public opinion** and influence societal attitudes towards women in leadership. They tend to choose what to project, who to project, in what ways to be projected and where emphasis to be placed. In social media and even some websites, there is a tendency to **focus on the image and not the substance**; *“I often see some websites commenting on the **appearance** of women and how they choose to dress but the same thing is not observed for men”*. This focus on non-relevant aspects can **trivialise their accomplishments and expertise**, diverting attention from their policy positions and leadership qualities. Male leaders, on the other hand, are more likely to be evaluated based on their actions, ideas, and political achievements, as participants shared. Media coverage of women in leadership often places disproportionate emphasis on their appearance, fashion choices, or personal lives, instead of focusing on what she said and done in relation to actual politics. Adding to that, the **choice of words and language used** to describe women in leadership can frame public perception and reinforce societal biases. Some participants identified the use of **sexism** in media; by framing a story using sexist writing and diminishing the role of a woman or asking intimidating questions by male journalists, reinforcing sexism in media. *“There will always be projection of the male dominance”*. Also, there were participants, who distinguished **media as social media and traditional media**. Focusing on the traditional media (TV, Radio, etc), two participants noted that women in leadership positions are treated the **same way as their male colleagues**. Lastly, some participants presented a more generic point of view by stating that media shape public's perception in almost everything, applying for both men and women. **Media should be objective and covering women and men in the same way**, i.e. covering their political views, positions, statements and judge them as politicians regardless of their gender.

4.4.4. Funding:

For the question regarding the differences between men and women candidates when accessing funding or resources for political campaigns differ. Contradicting perceptions were observed in this question. There were participants who stated that funding is given on a **collective level** and equal funding is given to men and women, so there are not any differences between genders. A participant added that this occurs due to the limited funding available. There were also participants who expressed that, **funding differs a lot**; It is far more likely for a man to gain access to funding and support for political campaigns than a woman. It was expressed that funding is not the same and will not be the same due to the fact that there not a high percentage of women very close getting elected. This is because there are not a lot of women candidates and the reason for that is because there are no statutory quotas in political parties. It was also stated that, funding is given to the candidates they want to be elected and that funding is given based on who you are and not about

the knowledge you have. Consequently, it is understood that the different perceptions of funding result from personal experiences as well as on the political parties' participants represent and are members of.

4.5. Questions to identify strategies to address barriers hindering women's participation in politics

4.5.1. Effective measures:

Proceeding on to the final set of questions, women participants shared a number of ideas regarding effective measures or initiatives that can help challenge gender bias and stereotypes in politics. Some participants referred to the implementation of **quotas**; Quotas can be applied as legislative measures that require a certain percentage of candidates or elected representatives to be women. Implementing quotas in political parties will force them to have the same number candidates between men and women. In that way, as a participant stated, they will involve women participation well in advance of any elections, be given a role, a reason, they will be active and useful for their political party and then as candidates. In that way, women will be aware of the whole political system and will be ready and well prepared to support the political party she represents. In that way, the representation of women will increase breaking traditional barriers, and ensuring greater diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes. Another point shared regarded the **National Mechanism for Women's Rights (EMRD)**, that is a broad umbrella covering women's movements/organisations and trade union organisations. The role of woman has changed; women are more independent, educated and autonomous. Such movements are further supported and promoted through such organisations and National Mechanisms for women's rights in order to shift the overall social perceptions of the role of women in society. Responses referred to **women believing in themselves and their capabilities**. *"The society itself makes us feel inferior, when we are able to do better"*. This was further analysed by explaining that this will be achieved through **education**; We need to make sure that from really young ages the role of girls is not inferior to boys; this needs to be tough theoretically and practically. Young girls need to be active, to be part of teams, to take decisions, to be part of decision-making teams; they need to be involved to develop abilities and capabilities from young ages in order to stand out and be successful in a chosen political career. Also, it was commented that in schools the subject of **'social behaviour'** needs to be implemented that will further foster social and political behaviour, as another participant stated. In that way, individuals in society will be able to **recognise gender bias and address its roots**, as another participant has shared. All these will also result to the idea of **solidarity**; supporting each other, supporting women, school visits, in families as it was also shared. This could be also well established through a **series of seminars** to both men-for self-reflection and awareness- and women for guidance and support-something that was stated by participants as effective measures. Similarly,

participants also referred to the promotion of gender sensitivities and **trainings** with both men and women; Such training can promote more inclusive practices in political settings and can also foster an understanding of the unique challenges women face in politics. Another participant also noted that, to help counter these gender bias and stereotypes we must help women and especially mothers in their everyday life. Thus, some measures may include **extending maternity leave** (and paternity leave), introducing **mandatory all-day school**, ensuring access to **public, free and of high-quality kindergartens** are some measures that can relief women and allow them to “compete” on more equal terms. **In order to achieve the elimination of stereotypes and prejudices, a change of culture is required, a deconstruction of patriarchal norms stemming from society and inadequate education, and this can be done at a greater level through the broader umbrella of education.**

“The society itself makes us feel inferior...”

4.5.2. Support from organisations:

For the question ‘how can organisations better support and promote women into leadership positions and decision-making roles?’, similar responses were shared by all participants. It was commonly identified and shared that **women need to be given the space and stage** to talk and be involved. Engaging women in thematic areas of their interests and gender; feminist issues, research gender issues, promoting specific policies countering women inequality and participating in more specific single-issue events- that concern women, will further trigger their overall desire for political and thus civic participation. Through such initiatives and supports given by their organisations, women can grab opportunities and show from early stages what they are capable to accomplish through their actions. Further support should be provided through trainings as well, that is directly linked with the following questions asked to the participants.

4.5.3. Training, mentorship and support programs:

For this question regarding what type of training, mentorship, or support programs would you find valuable in overcoming the identified barriers in your political career, most participants stated that certain trainings on **body position, public-speaking action-reaction, establish a character, self-esteem, media management, fundraising, campaign and how to highlight knowledge in a male-dominated field**. The ultimate goal of such trainings is for the role of women in politics to become normalised, and women be able to show their strength and power. A participant stated that nothing more needs to be done on what is currently happening in the island; there are a lot of things going on from political parties and women’s organisations. The important thing is to channel such information to all citizens, including both men and women. Lastly, a participant expressed that it is not a matter of individuals skills, we shouldn’t invest only in overcoming individual barriers. Rather, there should be a **collective fight to remove these barriers** once and for all on a societal level.

4.5.4. Inclusive and supportive environments:

For the question regarding the creation of inclusive and supportive environment within political organisations that fosters gender equality and encourages women's participation, women participants expressed common responses; To recognise the unequal opportunities that exist today, it was proposed to **raise awareness** and try to **adopt policies that can increase women participation**. Thus, the first thing for a political organisation is to **commit to the principle of gender equality**. This does not mean to adopt quotas, but rather to **engage in a dialogue to see how they can help the participation of women in the activities of a party**. They stated that the governing bodies should always take into consideration the female factor for any decisions and discussions taken. Special attention should be placed on the how women can be supported on a practical basis; To introduce **hybrid meetings** so that women that have domestic and family responsibilities can join and follow these meetings; for larger events, such as congress etc. **teachers or babysitters can be appointed to take care of the children** so that mothers can follow this kind of events, or be provided **financial assistance** in order for their children to be taken care of.

4.5.5. Role of men in gender equality:

For the last question regarding the role men have in promoting gender equality in politics and supporting women's political participation, most participants stated that **men have decisive role**; Men can be useful allies in breaking gender bias and stereotypes. They should promote positions that help close the gender gap and encourage participation of women in politics. At the same time, they must also be intolerant of any sexism or harassment women experience and be ready to counter these phenomena. Men must learn to identify and address gender bias, respect women and see them as equals and not as sexual interests or inferior to them. Also, they need to speak up and play their part to protect women from discrimination and/or sexual harassment. Men are key players in what regards the equal representation of women in the political sphere; once they realise that there is an issue in regards to gender representation in politics, they are the ones that will act towards a solution. However, while men are the majority in the political arena, and the percentage of women remains low. They should stop stating that women are the ones responsible for the low number in politics; similar comments were also expressed on an International Day of Women by the former president of Cyprus Republic. The first discussions should start by men as they are the majority in the political sphere of Cyprus. **Men should distant themselves from reproducing gender stereotypes and to understand and well comprehend the needs and experiences of women**. Lastly, some participants expressed a different perception by stating that women will find their way, without needing men to step up. The main thing is to face their self individually and build a resilient self. This was raised as it was stated that men will not take actions as this will have an impact against them, as some of them will need to step back for women to be included within the political sphere. According to the common responses, men play a vital role in in promoting gender equality in politics and supporting women's political participation. **Their involvement is crucial** as they will be actively engaging in allyship and advocacy, amplifying women's voices and contributions, dismantling

gender biases and stereotypes within political structures, fostering inclusive and respectful environments, and actively working towards creating equal opportunities and representation for women in political leadership roles. **Men have can challenge the existing power dynamics and promote a more equitable and inclusive political landscape.**

Overall, a plethora of responses were stated by the participants for all questions, revealing both commonalities and differences. It is observed that all statements and testimonials were well rooted from each individuals' political orientations, mostly from experiences of each of these women and most importantly from their common passion of the constant improvement in women's representation in the political sphere.

4.6. Summary of key strategies proposed by focus group and interview participants

Deconstructing and analysing the responses of the eight participants, several key strategies were proposed to address the barriers and challenges faced by women in politics. Below a summary of these strategies can be found categorised by topic:

Role models: The transition phase experienced will mark the beginning of a great projection of women role models in politics. Symbolic Women representations in politics should be created based on diverse and non-stereotypical elements, demonstrating women in key positions in politics. Such symbols should be clearly promoted highlighting their achievements and contributions to the political sphere.

Media influence: Participants suggested that media coverage, especially social media, should advocate a balance representation of both genders, whilst focusing on accurate representations about women in politics that mirrors an emphasis on their political positions, expertise and contributions rather than solely on their gender physical appearance.

Supportive environments and work life balance: Participants emphasised the importance of providing supportive infrastructures and services such as: appointed teachers or babysitters in regards to childcare facilities, elderly care, flexible work arrangements, through the use of hybrid meetings ensuring active participation, financial assistant and economic support, maternity leave, all-day school or convenient pick-up times with set transportation options, accessible and high-quality public kinder-gardens.

Law enforcement and quotas: Participants highlighted the implementation of quotas in order to guarantee the active involvement of women in politics that can further support gender equal and the equal representation of women in the political arena. The essential commitment to the principles of gender equality, along with law enforcement and the provision of necessary facilities

for women, was also specified. Political organisations should engage in dialogue to explore ways they can enhance women's participation and how they can improve the participation of women in the activities of a political party (even without relying on quotas) fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment within their activities.

Decision-making roles: Participants stressed the importance developing the spaces and places for women to have their voices heard. It is essential to create inclusive and empowering environments to promote this spaces and places as well as environments that provide opportunities for early involvement and decision-making roles. Encouraging young girls to actively participate, join teams, make decisions, and be part of decision-making processes allows them to develop skills and capabilities from a young age, setting them up for an active involvement in their future political careers.

Trainings: Engaging women in thematic areas of interest and gender-related discussions, including feminist issues and specific policies countering women's inequality, can enhance their desire for political and civic participation. Effective measures such as trainings on body language, public speaking, self-esteem, media management, fundraising, and navigating male-dominated fields are essential. It is important to address challenges like sexism and appearance biases through trainings that foster empathy and inclusive reactions between men and women. Men must identify and address gender bias, actively support gender equality by identifying and addressing gender bias, respecting women as equals, encourage their participation and speaking up against discrimination and harassment. Implementing gender-sensitive trainings for both men and women can promote inclusivity in politics and increase understanding of the unique challenges faced by women.

Social attitudes and social norms: Participants emphasised the need to advance education. Education and raising awareness, starting from early childhood, are essential in teaching boys and girls about gender equality, solidarity, and respect. It is important to ensure that girls are not seen as inferior to boys. Promoting gender equality requires disseminating information to all members of society, regardless of gender. The elimination of these barriers on a societal level should be a collective effort. Women's organisations play a crucial role in advancing gender equality that raise awareness to the public in regards to the equal representation of women in politics.

5. Results of the questionnaire “Perceptions and attitudes on women's political participation”

5.1. Structure of the questionnaire and its analysis

As part of the research to further study the barriers and strategies underlying the political participation of women in Italy, we conducted a questionnaire on “Perceptions and attitudes on women's political participation”. The questionnaire was released during April 2023 through mailings and social networks and was answered anonymously.

In this section we present the results of the questionnaire, aimed at understanding voters' perceptions about the participation of women in politics and leadership positions. The study was designed to shed light on the respondents' attitudes towards various aspects of gender equality in the political sphere, including gender bias, role models, work-life balance, and strategies to enhance female representation.

A total of **85 individuals** participated in the survey, including a mix of men and women from diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and political affiliations. The survey comprised a series of 38 questions, where respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), as follows:

1. Totally disagree
2. Disagree
3. I am not sure
4. Agree
5. Totally agree

We analysed results based on two focuses:

- By **overall responses** regarding the different barriers and strategies:
 - Bias and stereotypes (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9)
 - Role models (Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13)
 - Double standards and scrutiny (Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17)
 - Work-life Balance (Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21)
 - Other barriers (hostile work environments, media portrayals, cultural norms, etc.) (Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34)
 - Strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38)

- By demographic characteristics of the respondents:
 - All respondents
 - By gender (men / women / non-binary)
 - By age (under 40 / 40 and over)
 - By education level (non-tertiary education / university degree or higher)
 - By political affiliation (left / right / non-disclosure or other)

In the analysis by demographic group, questions were grouped into four categories:

- 22 questions with a negative correlation to gender equality (a high score means less gender equality)
- 11 questions with a positive correlation to gender equality (a high score means more gender equality)
- 1 question on perception on leadership style differences between men and women
- 4 questions related to strategies to overcome gender inequality in politics.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked open ended questions about additional barriers and strategies, which were also analysed to identify additional information relevant to our research.

5.2 Demographics of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows:

Total Respondents: 85 individuals

Place of residence: All responses were from Cyprus, covering the regions of: Nicosia, Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos and Famagusta

Gender:

- Men: 27
- Women: 55
- Non-binary: 3

Age:

- The average age of respondents: 34
- The youngest respondent was 20 years old and the oldest was 68 years old.
- The median age of respondents: 31

Education:

- Primary Education: 0 respondents
- Secondary Education: 6 respondents
- Post-secondary education (non-tertiary): 6 respondents
- Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent: 22 respondents
- Master's Degree or Equivalent: 51 respondents
- Doctoral Degree or Equivalent: 2 respondents

Political Affiliation:

- Did not respond: 50 respondents
- Left: 25 respondents

- Right: 5 respondents
- Other: 5 respondents

It should be noted that the political affiliation question was optional, and therefore, a significant number of respondents chose not to disclose their political leanings. The majority of those who did disclose their political affiliations leaned towards the left.

5.3 Overall results regarding barriers and strategies

5.3.1. Interpretation of results by barrier:

Based on the average responses to the questions by all respondents, the following interpretations can be made:

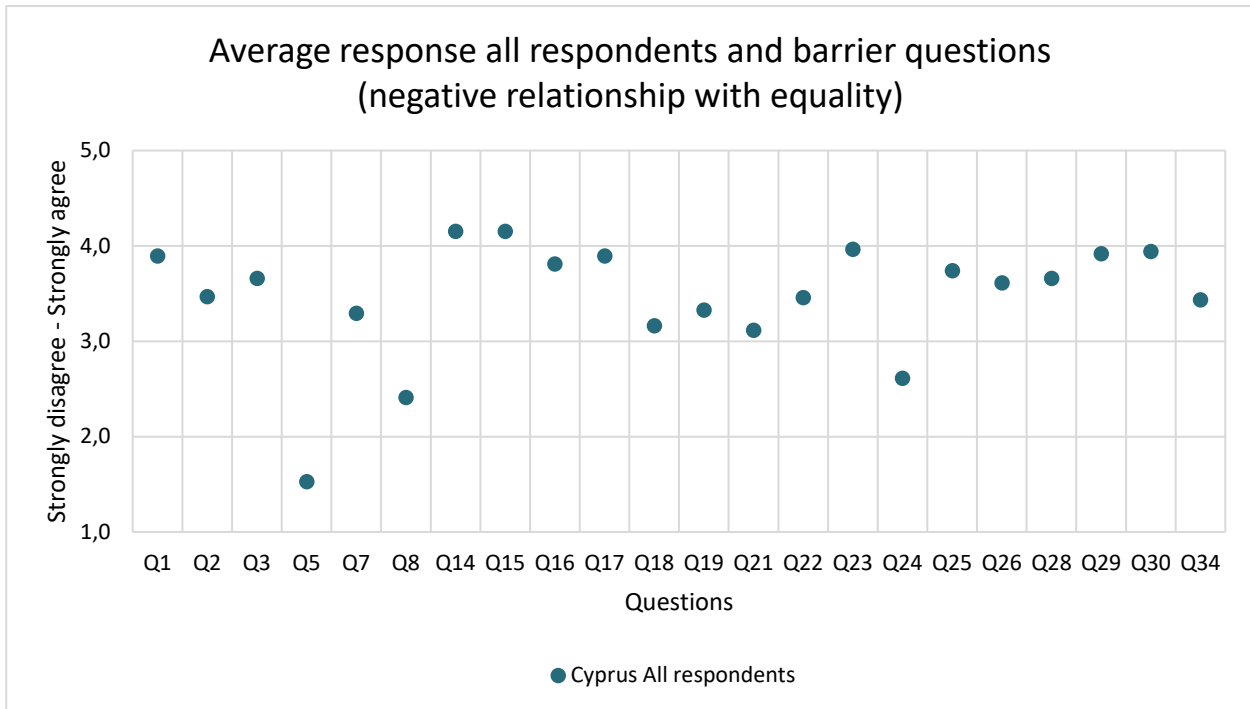
Bias and stereotypes (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9).

Role models (Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13).

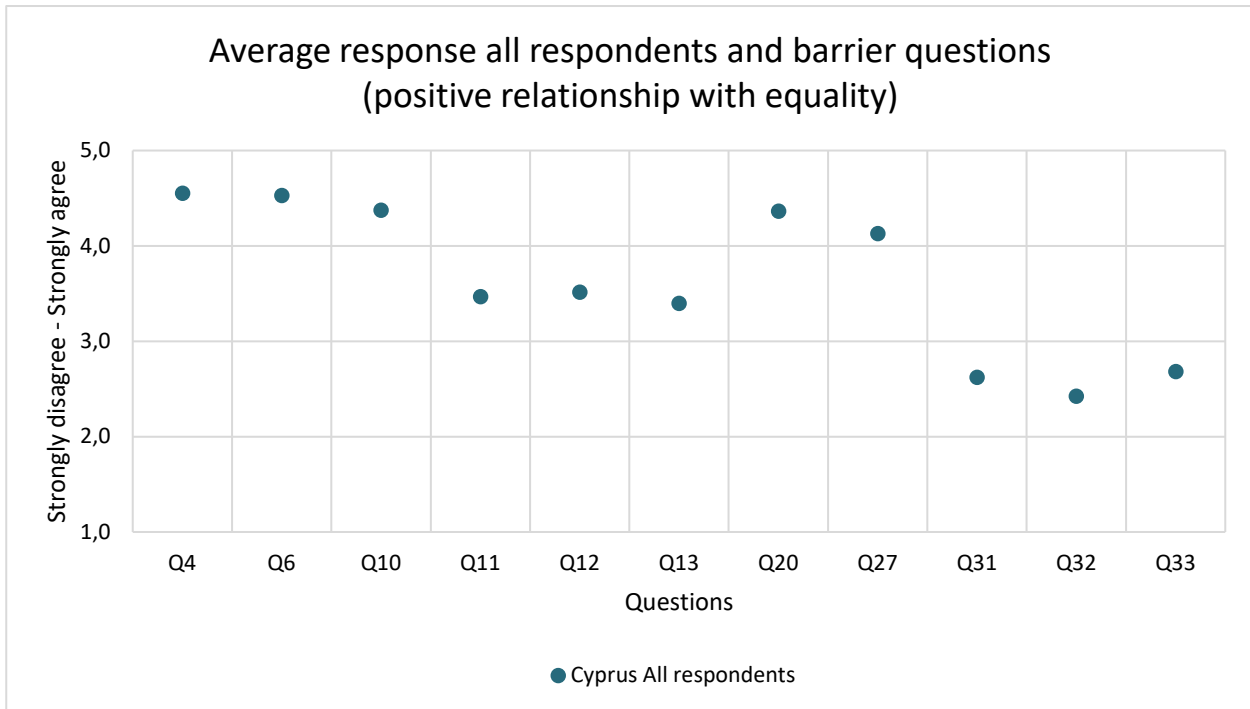
Double standards and scrutiny (Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17).

Work-life balance (Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21).

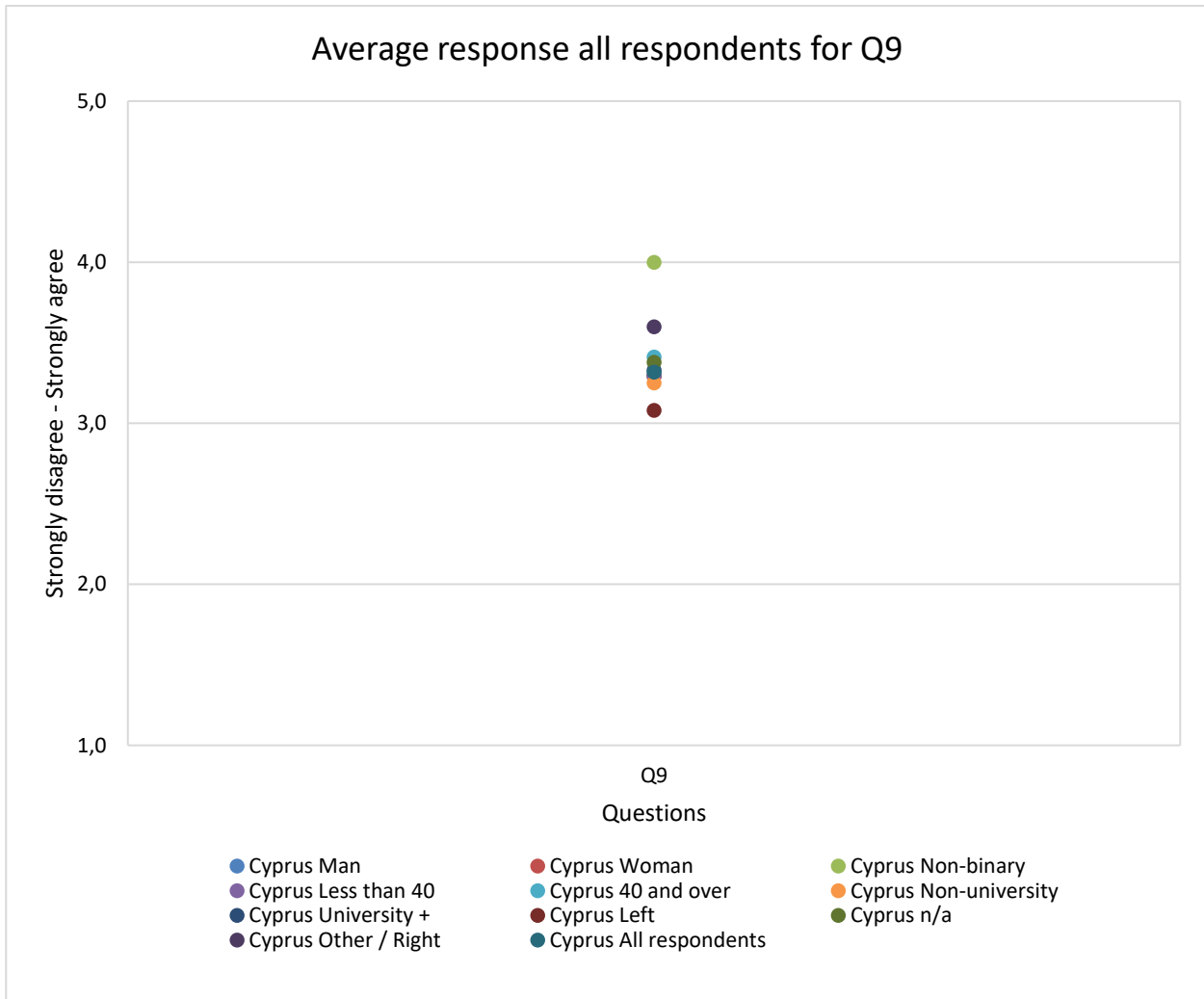
Other Barriers (Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34).



Respondents' answers to barrier-related questions with a negative correlation with equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34). The average responses to the barrier-related questions with a negative relationship to equality were generally high in agreement except from Q5 (I usually feel male candidates are better qualified), Q8 (I have felt discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of my gender) and Q24 (I have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or in politics), with the lowest in scoring being Q5. This may show that all respondents are aware that gender stereotypes still exist, and this constitutes a fundamental obstacle to the professional advancement of women in politics. The really low scores in Q5, reflect that the comparison between the qualifications, abilities and capabilities between male and female candidates may further reveal the acknowledgement of the presence of biases and rejection of gender prejudices that hinder gender equality in the political landscape. This shows that all respondents are aware that gender stereotypes still exist, and the low mark recorded in Q5 reveal the great awareness of respondents about the falsely comparison of qualification and male candidates that still subsists. This may mirror progress in the ongoing progress towards the achievement of gender equality in the political arena.



Respondents' answers to barrier-related questions with a positive relationship with equality (Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q20, Q27, Q31, Q32, and Q33). The average response to the barrier-related questions with positive relationship to equality were generally high in agreement. This can reveal an overall positive attitude about the presence of women in politics whilst holding leadership positions, whilst suggesting a widespread recognition of persistent challenges in achieving gender equality in politics, with the need to create an equitable political environment. Lowest marks were recorded in Q31 (The cultural norms in my country support women's participation in politics), Q32 (There are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in my community) and Q33 (The media in my country portrays women politicians fairly and accurately). This may reveal that the current state of the country does not facilitate women's involvement in politics, as there are unequal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles. This is further maintained by the media coverage as well as the overall cultural and societal norms that contribute and formulate the perception of gender-based obstacles, gender roles and equality in the political arena.



Respondents' answers to Q9. Responses to Q9 (men and women have different leadership styles) varied in accordance with category. More specifically, responses that fall under the category of age (Less than 40 and 40 and over) as well as the category identified as educational background (University +, non-university), were similar. The greatest gaps were identified in the categories of gender (man, woman, non-binary), where higher scores, leading to agreements were recorded for those identified as non-binary, rather than men and women respondents. (It is worth noting that a very low number was recorded as non-binary from the participants pool reached, that may have further influenced the overall results, analysis and conclusions drawn). The greatest emphasis should be placed for the scores recorded identified under political affiliation, that was the greatest gap in responses recorded for this question. More specifically, for this statement, those identified as 'Cyprus Other/Right' leaned more on agreement, referring that men and women have different leadership styles, whereas those identified as 'Cyprus Left' scored lower, leaning to disagreement. The score may reflect and thus emphasise the differences in political ideologies that formulate the perspective adopted regarding gender equality; where on the one hand we can understand the rejection of inherent gender-based leadership differences, whilst on the other hand, the acknowledgement of these differences. Such results show the role of political ideologies in influencing perceptions of gender-related issues within the context of leadership and politics or how

people with certain views around gender equality identify themselves in specific political affiliations due to certain ideologies.

5.3.2. Interpretation of results by strategy:

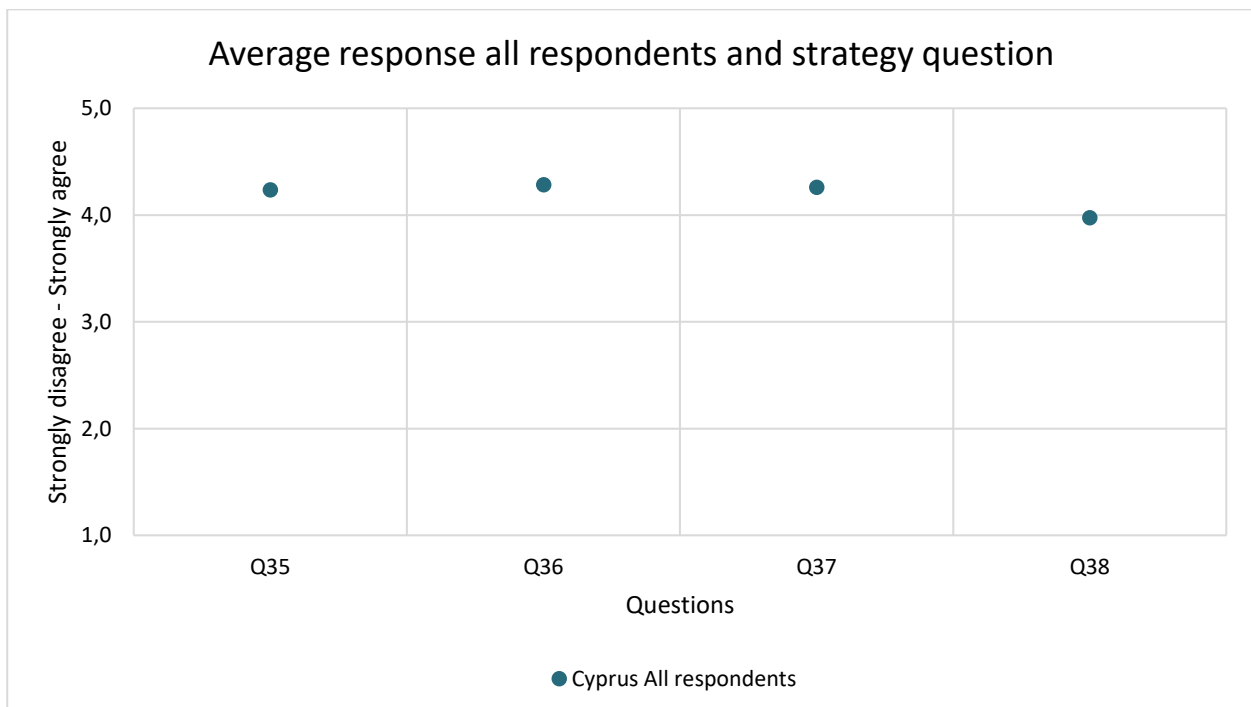
The strategies suggested (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38) to increase the representation of women in leadership positions were highly rated by respondents, showing a strong consensus on the need for proactive measures:

Encourage women to pursue leadership roles from a young age (Q35)

Implement diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics (Q36)

Provide mentorship and support for women in leadership positions (Q37)

Engage in awareness raising campaigns (Q38)



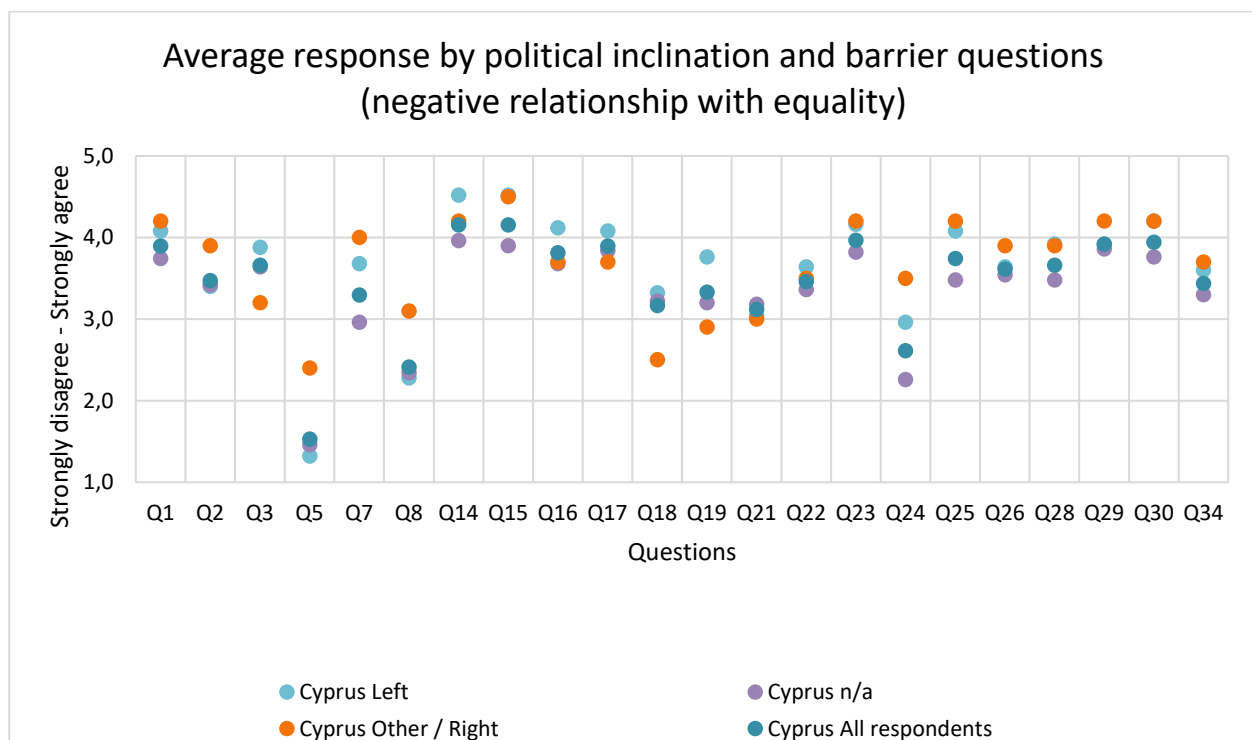
Respondents' answers to questions related to strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38). Responses to these questions were quite high. These results indicate that all strategies proposed in these statements are important for increasing women in leadership positions. The common high scores, leaning to agreement and strongly agreement, mark an overall desire for social change where women are actively, equally, and respectfully involved in the political arena.

5.4. Results by demographic groups

The collected data was further analysed based on various demographic groups, including political inclination, gender, age, educational level, and political affiliation, to identify significant differences among them. The analysis primarily focused on highlighting the key values and identifying any observed variations.

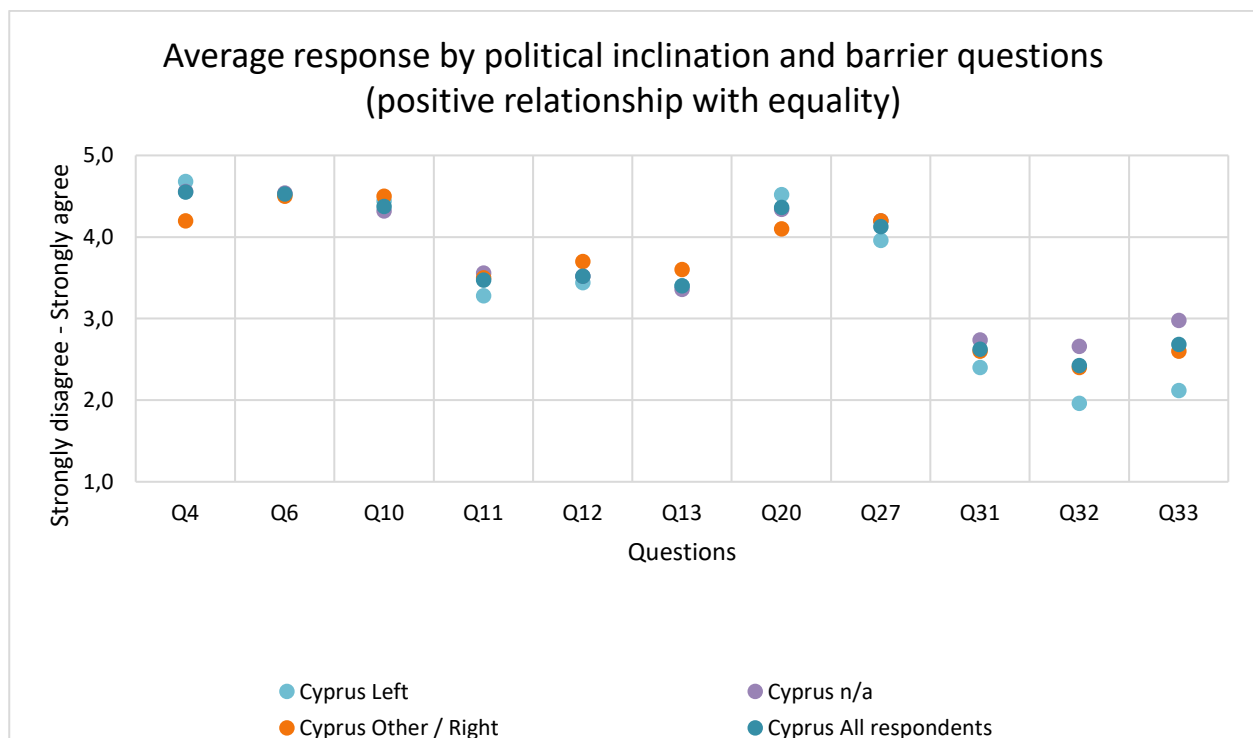
To ensure consistency, the questions were organised into groups following the same structure as in section 5.3, which encompassed topics such as Bias and Stereotypes, Role Models, Double Standards, Work-Life Balance, Other Barriers and Strategies. By examining the data through this framework, the aim was to uncover insights and discern any notable distinctions among the demographic groups.

5.4.1. Interpretation of results by political inclination:

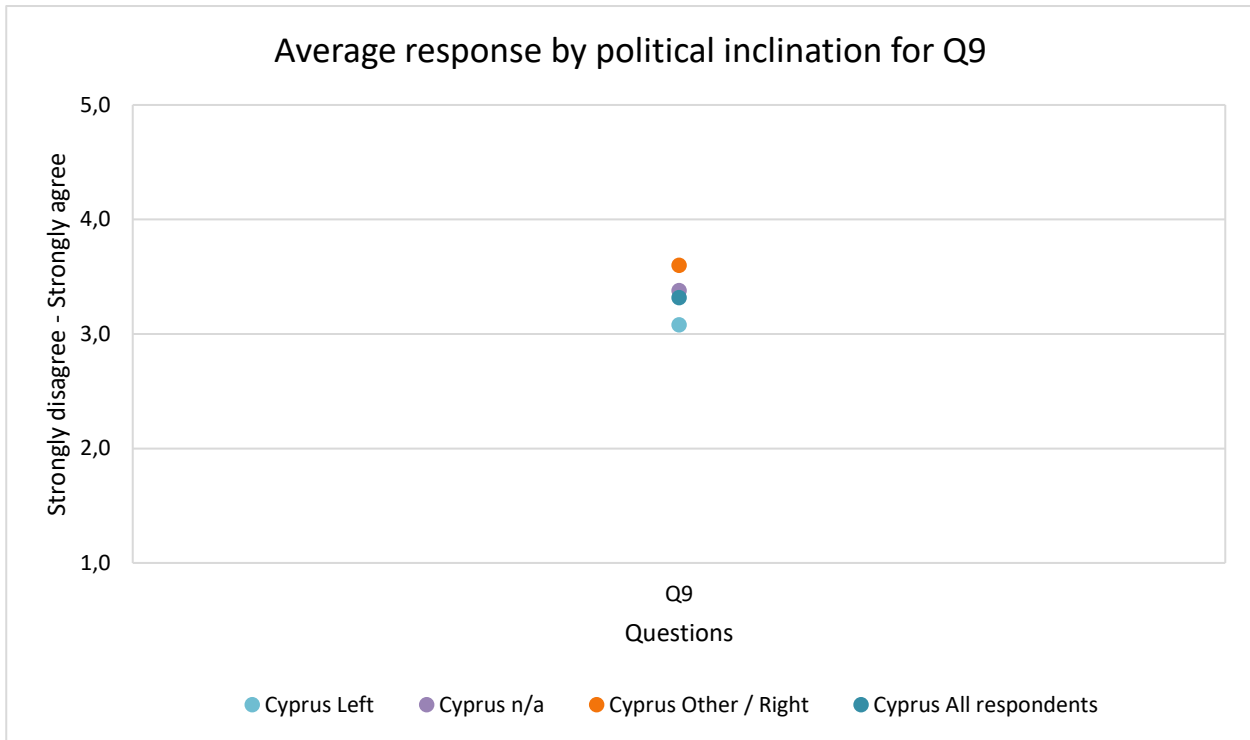


Respondents’ answers to barrier-related questions with a negative correlation with equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34). The average responses to the barrier-related questions with negative relationship with equality were slightly higher for those identified ‘Other/Right’ rather than the rest of the respondents, for most of the questions. By detail observing it, it is understood that this applies for

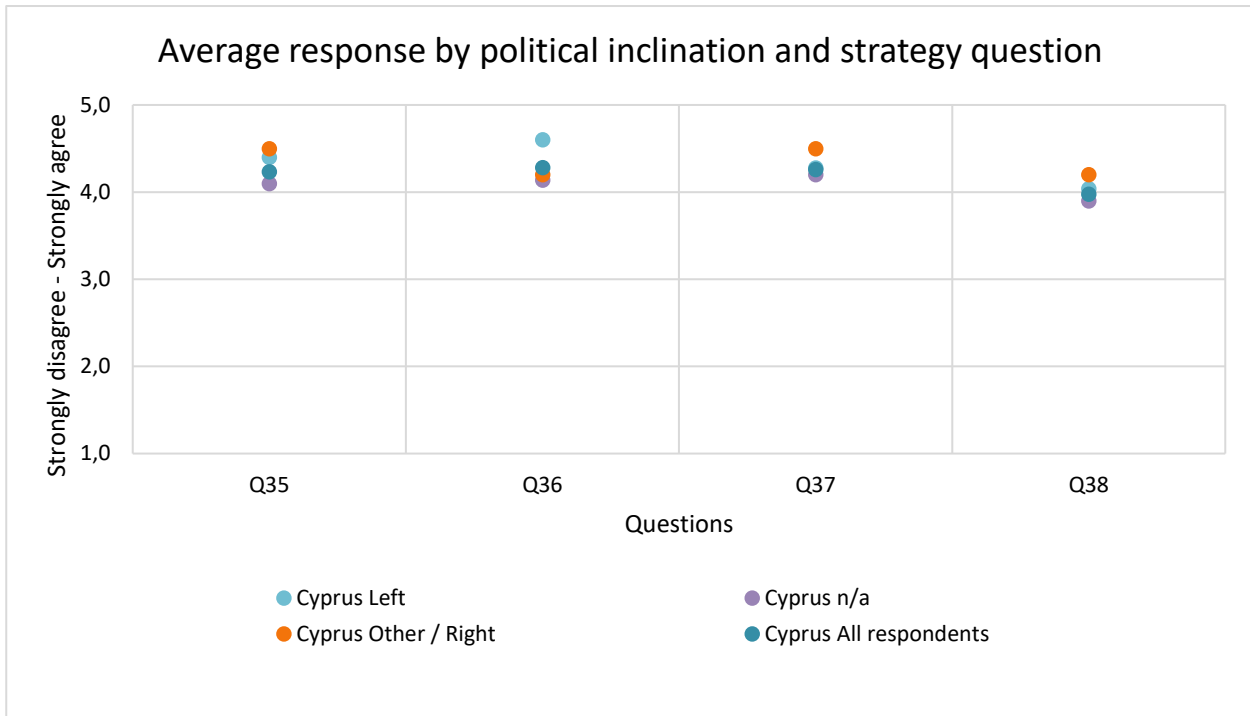
Q1,2,7, 15,23-34, were the responses of those identified as 'Other/Right' were slightly higher than from the rest of the participants. For the rest of the questions, responses recorded from participants identified as 'Left' were slightly higher than the rest of the responses. The exception to the averages recorded, seems to be identified in Q5 (men candidates being better qualified) and Q8 (feeling discouraged from pursuing leadership due to gender), where responses were people identified as the 'Left' leaned slightly more on to disagreeing with the statements. For Q18 (being more challenging for women in politics to maintain a healthy work-life balance in relation to other career choices), it seems that people identified as the 'Other/Right' leaned more on more on to disagreeing with the statement. This is also identified for Q24 (witnessing or experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace or in politics), as respondents without stating any political affiliation, leaned more on to disagreeing with the statement. This might indicate that even if respondents identified as both 'Left' and 'Other/Right' or non-identified in a political inclination, may have high recognition and acknowledgment of gender bias issues. One can also understand that the left-leaning respondents expressed a slightly greater resistance of accepting certain barriers, in accordance with the questions that averages were higher for those identified as 'Left' rather than the rest of the participants. This could reflect a more egalitarian or gender-neutral perspective from left-oriented individuals, indicating a departure from the established societal norms and attitudes with the emphasis on fighting for equality.



Respondents' answers to barrier-related questions with a positive correlation with equality (Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q20, Q27, Q31, Q32, and Q33). The average responses to the barrier related questions with positive relationship with equality were slightly higher for those identified as 'Other/Right' as well as for those who did not identify themselves in a political affiliation. Specifically, this is observed in Q12 (having a female role model or mentor in a leadership position who inspired or supported me), Q13 (women frequently occupy leadership positions in my workplace or community) and Q27 (political organisations actively promoting women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality). These results may reveal a perspective or awareness that is defined as closer to gender equality among these groups. Taking it a step further, it could be also argued that the high results may how the efforts to equality due to an already pre-existing gap in gender equality withing the political arena. Higher responses were also identified from participants who did not identify themselves in a political affiliation. This was identified in Q31 (The cultural norms in my country support women's participation in politics), Q32 (There are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in my community) and Q33 (the media in my country portrays women politicians fairly and accurately). These results may reveal that the non-self-identification in a political affiliation, may have a more positive approach to the questions that show positive relationship with equality, since they do not ideologically belong to a political party. Lastly, it is clearly observed that a remarkable results difference was identified in Q4 (women being as capable as men in political leadership roles), Q31 (the cultural norms in my country support women's participation in politics), Q32 (mentioned above) and Q33 (mentioned above), were participants identified as 'Left' marked this question very low, revealing their (strongly) disagreement. Interestingly, for Q4, the average responses from 'Other/Right' were lower than the rest of the participants. The gap identified in these questions, illustrates that the spectrum of viewpoints within the 'Left' and 'Other/Right' affiliations on gender, cultural norms and equal political participation are multilayered. The complex interplay of personal experiences, social contexts, and dominant political ideologies reveal their interconnectivity reflected in the different results recorded as well as the diversity of individuals' perspectives.



Respondents' answers to Q9 (men and women have different leadership styles) reveal a notable result difference especially between 'Left' participants and participants identified as 'Other/Right'. Specifically, the responses of participants identified as 'Left' participants lean onto not being sure about the statement, whereas responses of participants identified as 'Other/Right' lean onto agreeing with the statement. This divergence in responses underline the contrasting viewpoint on whether women and men have different leadership styles. This points out the complicated alchemy of political orientation, personal belief, experience and societal expectations into the overall understanding gender equality and representation in the political sphere.



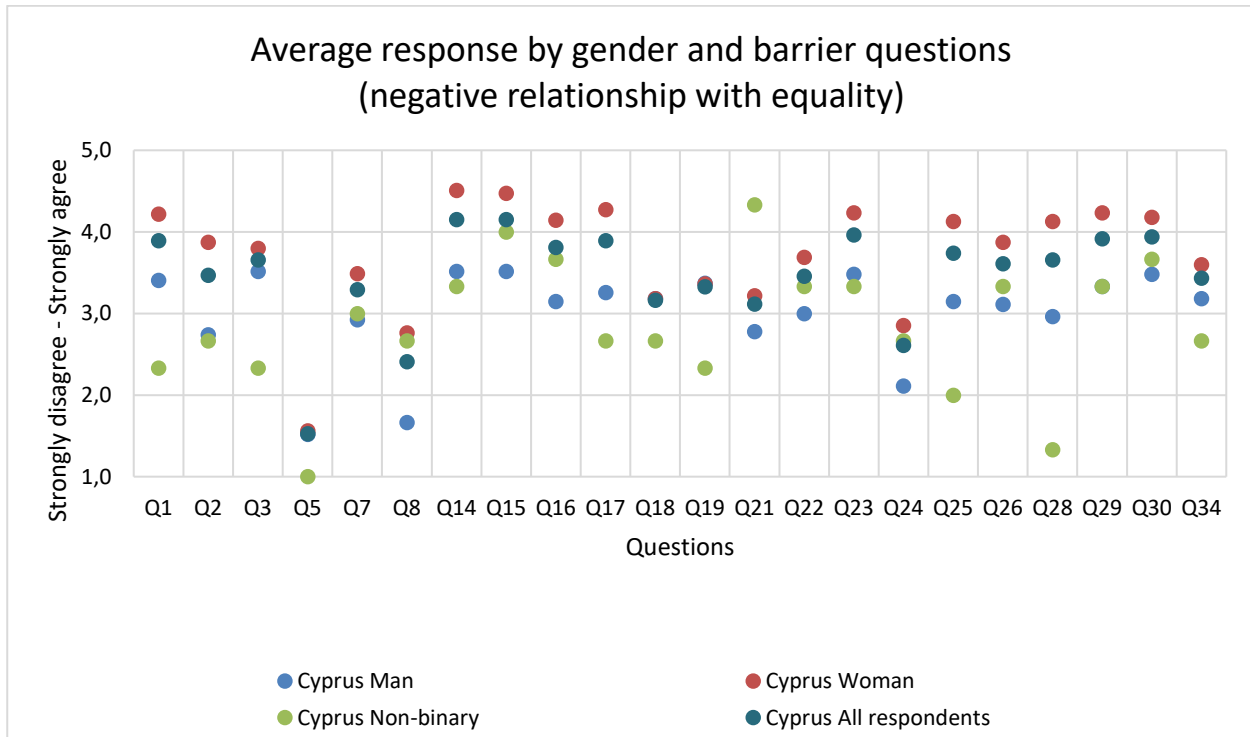
Respondents’ answers to questions related to strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38). Responses to these questions were quite high across all groups, suggesting an overall common belief in the need for strategies to overcome gender inequality, such as encouraging women to pursue leadership roles from a young age (Q35), implementing diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics (Q36), providing mentorship and support for women in leadership positions (Q37) and engaging in awareness raising campaigns (Q38). In all the questions, except Q36, participants identified as ‘Other/Right’ scored slightly higher than participants identified as ‘Left’ and participants who did not identify themselves in a political affiliation. However, a great difference was identified in Q36, where people identified as the ‘Left’ scored the question higher than the rest of the participants, showing a gap between the responses of the participants. In summary, the overall high agreement on the need for strategies to overcome gender inequality can signify a consensus among respondents regardless of their political orientation. The higher score of the ‘Left’ for Q36 echoes the broader ideology and belief in addressing gender inequality via systemic and institutional changes and adjustments all through collective efforts.

Overall difference in responses by political inclination:

Overall, both ‘Left’ and ‘Other/Right’ responses reveal a high recognition and gender bias issues as well as the agreement for the development of strategies to overcome gender inequality. The overall ‘Left’ respondents tend to explicitly reflect an emphasis on their broader ideology orbiting around gender-neutral orientations, tackling systemic biases and promoting equal opportunities where the focus turns on collective efforts in fighting for equality, social justice, and comprehensive solutions to societal changes.

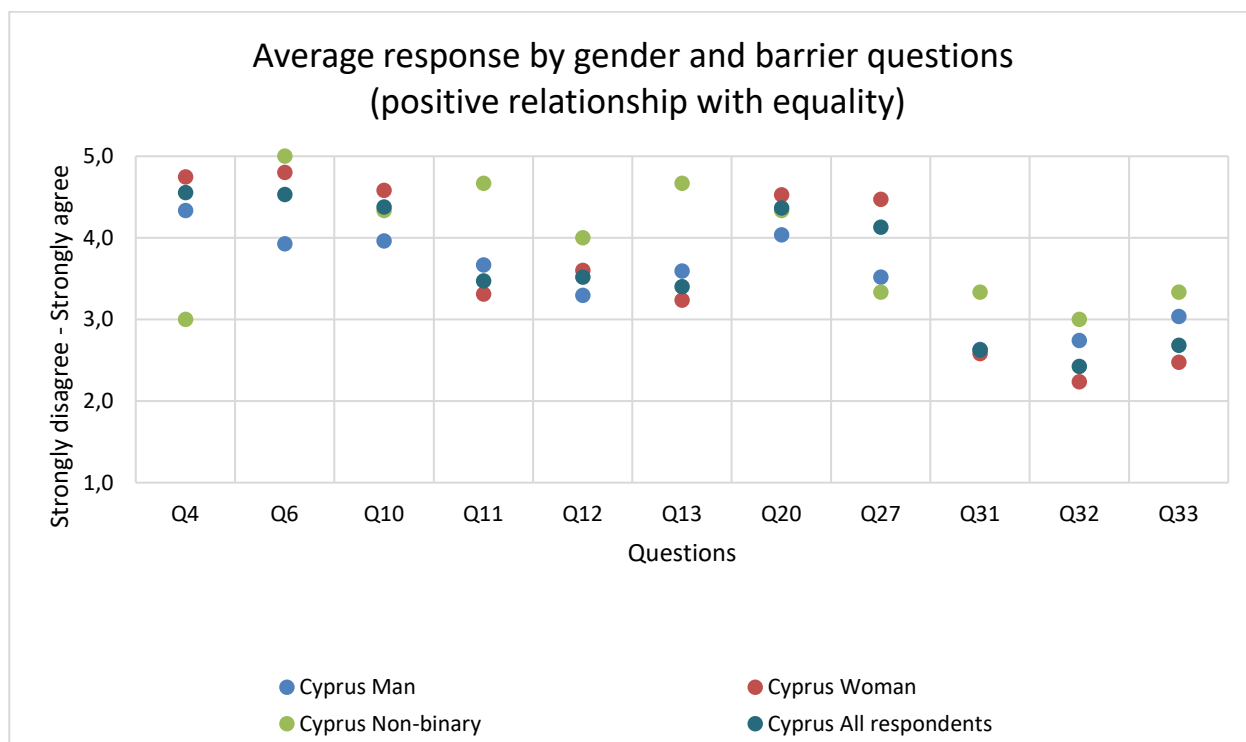
5.4.2. Interpretation of results by gender:

**For these questions it should be taken into consideration that the majority of respondents were female, and a very low number was recorded as non-binary from the participants pool reached, that may have further influenced the overall results, analysis and conclusions drawn.*

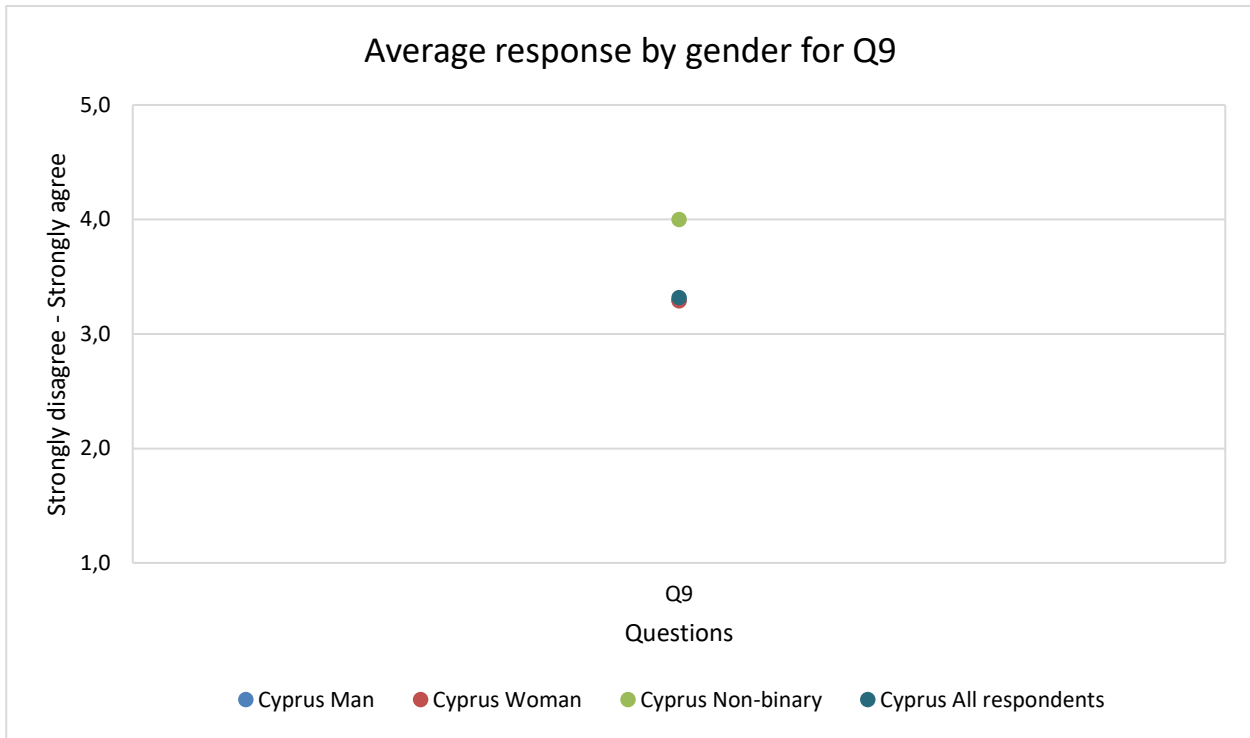


Barrier-related questions with a negative relationship with equality: For questions relating to barriers and biases that hinder gender equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34), women generally expressed higher levels of agreement than men and non-binary. This might be an indication that women might have experienced instances of bias and stereotypes, frequent to a significant extent in the field of politics. The results can also reveal that women might be more aware of gender biases. Both assumptions, could reveal that women may need to strive harder than compared to men for the same positions, due their overall comprehensive social understanding of the theme of gender. The widest gap between gender-responses was identified in responses about women perceived as emotional decision-makers (Q2) and about feeling discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of my gender (Q8), where in both questions women’s responses leaned to agreement and strongly agreement, whereas men responses leaned to disagreement and strongly disagreement. This divergence might indicate that women may unconsciously believe that there is a greater difficulty for political engagement, that may further reveal the presence of gender-related stereotypes. Interestingly, for the question about male candidates being better qualified (Q5) all responses marked the question very low, signifying their experience and representation of male candidates on a national level. Due to this, the respondents may show a positive indication for gender for gender equality in the pollical sphere. Lastly, in the majority of questions, non-binary exhibited lowest levels

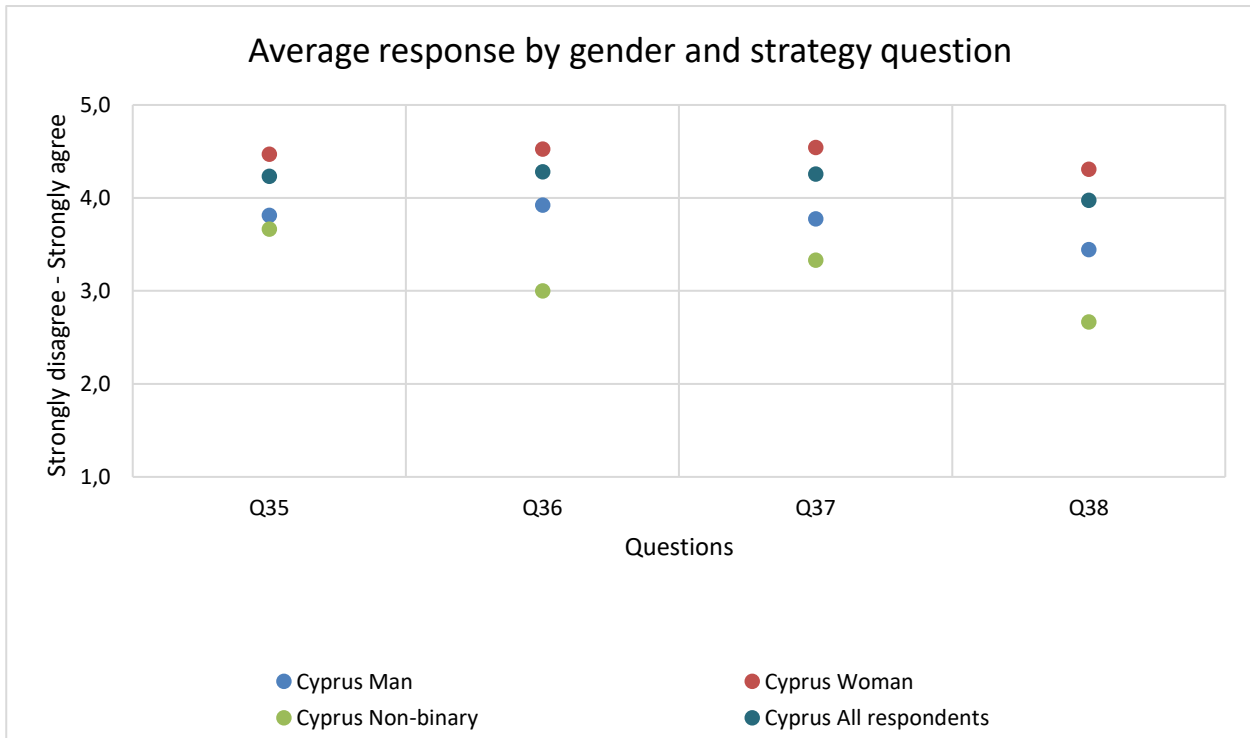
of agreements. Overall, the results indicate that there is gender-based differences in how individuals perceive barriers and biases related to gender equality. This further reveals that there is presence of gender-related stereotypes, having further implications to the experiences for gender equality and the experiences of each individual.



Barrier-related questions with a positive relationship with equality. For questions highlighting positive phases or progress towards gender equality (Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q20, Q27, Q31, Q32, and Q33), both genders generally showed high levels of agreement. In the vast majority of questions those identified as non-binary exhibited high levels of agreement except from questions about women being as capable as men in political leadership roles (Q4) and political organisations should actively promote women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality (Q27). For the majority of questions, women scored higher than men, except for Q11 (easily identifying women role models), Q13 (women frequently occupy leadership positions in my workplace or community), Q32 (women and men have equal opportunities to pursue leadership roles in my community) and Q33 (the media in my country portrays women politicians fairly and accurate), were men appeared in greater agreement of the above statements. The results indicate the differences in responses between men and women, that can explicitly portray specific areas the lack of gender equality perceptions and efforts as well as the individual- gender-experience to all these themes that may boost multidimensional obstacles to women.



When asked whether men and women have different leadership styles (**Q9**), the results tend to lean approximately on the same score, with a barely minimum difference in score numbers. This may indicate that there is not a significant difference on how both men and women perceive the differences in gender leadership styles. This neutrality may suggest openness to gender equality principles between both men and women. Also, the common scoring numbers, may also reveal a common leadership style mirrored in individuals located in leadership positions. This may show on the one hand a gender-neutral leadership style or on the other hand a common formula that is mechanically adopted by both men and women for their survival. Conversely, non-binary individuals scored this question much higher. Such score difference, expressing higher levels of agreement, may underscore the importance of recognising and understanding diverse perspectives, experiences and the individual perception.



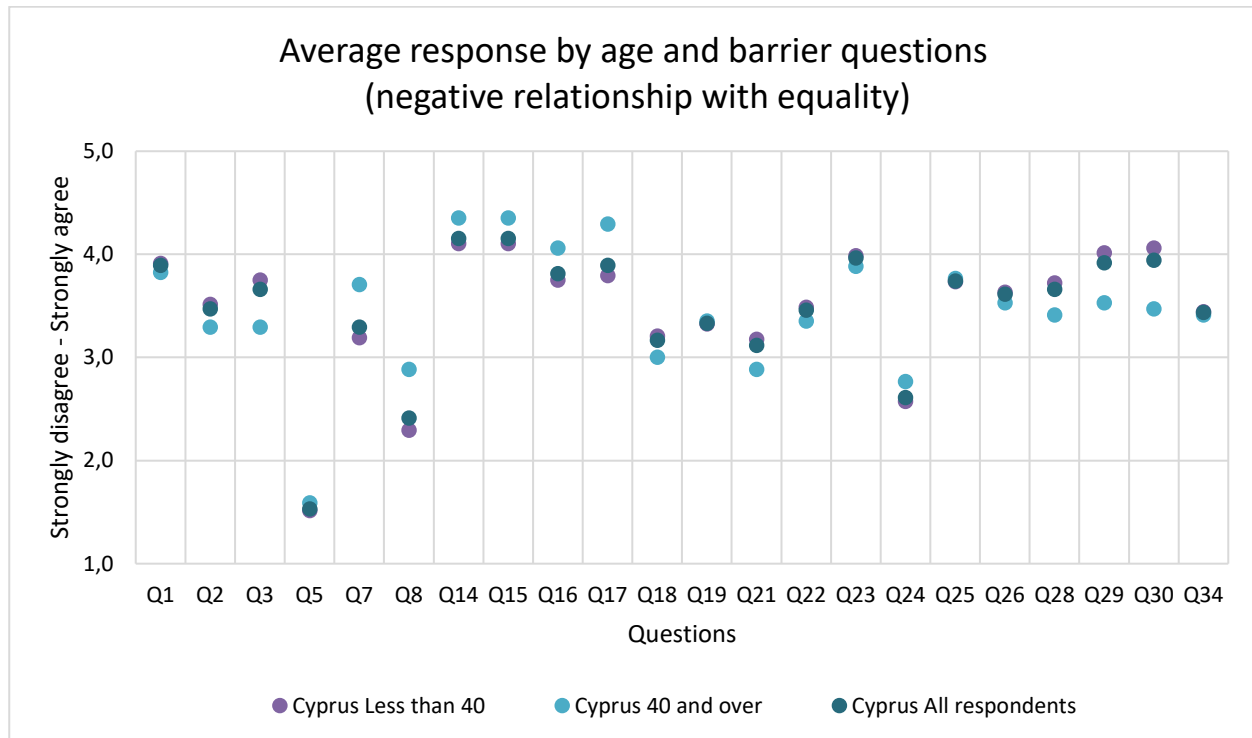
Strategies to overcome inequality. In response to strategies for overcoming gender inequality (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38), non-binary showed lower agreement than the genders, whereas, both genders exhibited strong agreement; Women scored slightly more in favour of the statements: encouraging women to pursue leadership roles from a young age (Q35), implementing diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics (Q36), providing mentorship and support for women in leadership positions (Q37) and engaging in awareness raising campaigns (Q38). The higher scores among women respondents may suggest an overall recognition of the necessity for proactive measures to enhance the presence of women in political leadership roles as well as the greater support and encouragement for initiatives stated above. These findings can underline women's active engagement in promoting gender equality in various aspects of society, including the political sphere.

Overall difference in responses by gender:

In general, women displayed a greater inclination to identify obstacles to equality and endorse approaches for achieving gender equality. The results can suggest their active support gender equality initiatives. This might stem from their individual encounters or a heightened sensitivity to gender biases. Conversely, men, although acknowledging these barriers, expressed a somewhat more positive perspective regarding gender equality in the realm of politics. The difference in perspective can be shaped in accordance with gender and experience, revealing varying perceptions regarding gender equality.

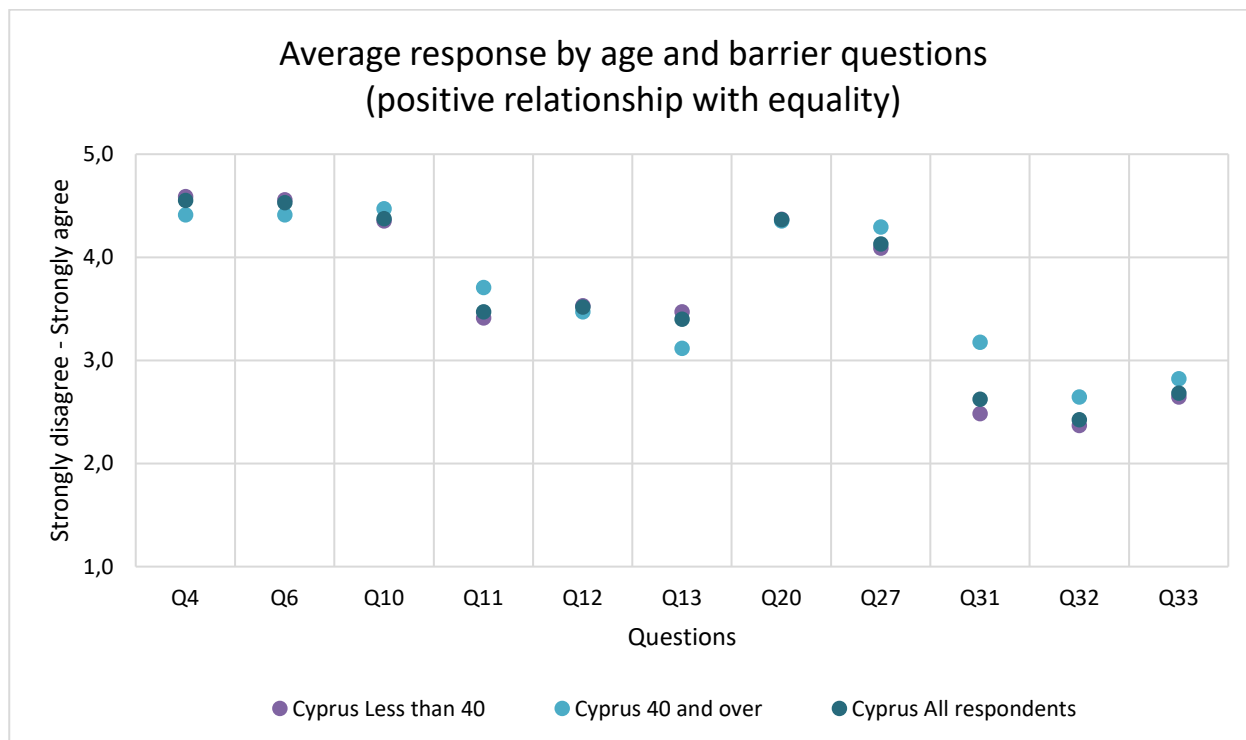
5.4.3. Interpretation of results by age:

**For these questions it should be taken into consideration that the majority of respondents were less than 40 years old, and a low number was recorded over 40 years old from the participants pool reached, that may have further influenced the overall results, analysis and conclusions drawn.*



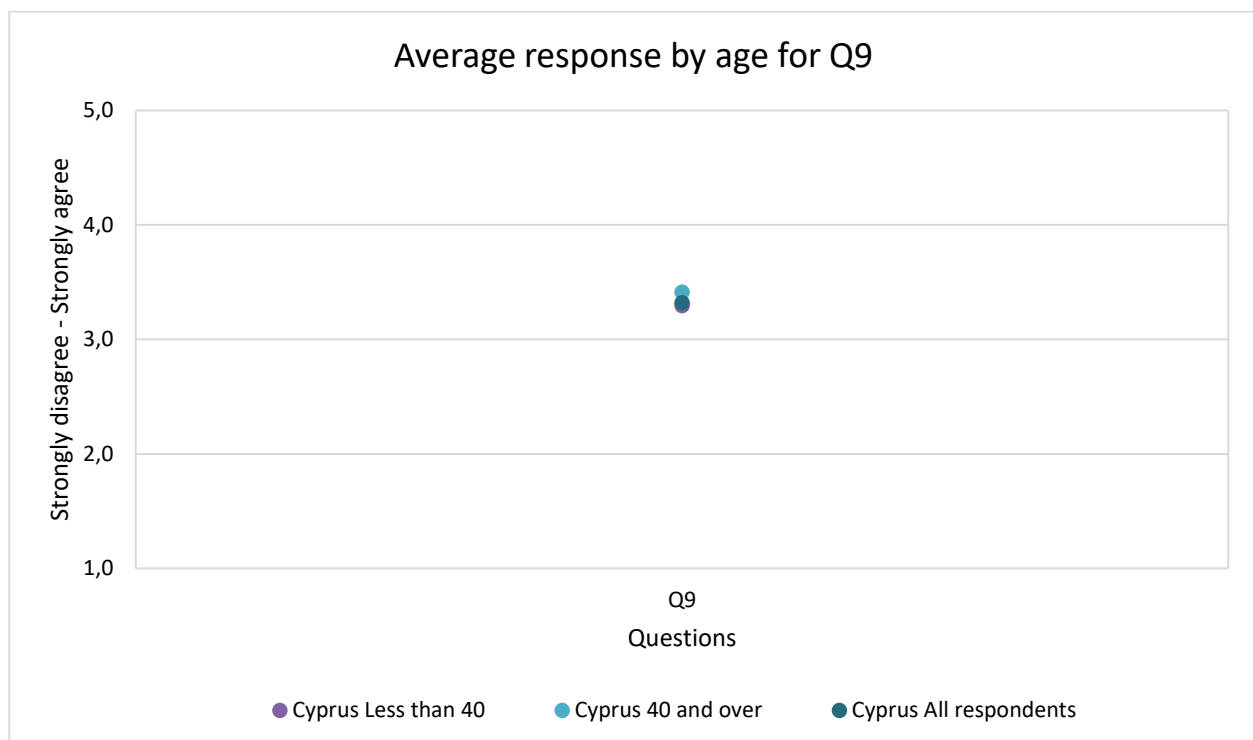
Barrier-related questions with a negative relationship with equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34). Interestingly, it is overall observed that scores leaning to agreement were recorded for both groups; under 40 and over 40. More specifically, for Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q24 it is clearly observed that the age group of over 40 years old recorded higher levels of agreement. For Q2, Q3, Q18, Q21, Q28, Q29, Q30 it is clearly observed that the age group of less than 40 years old recorded higher levels of agreement. Observing the questions that people over 40 have recorded higher levels of agreement, age-related differences in perspectives on gender equality may reveal factors that may impact the perception of equality. For example, for Q7 and Q24, historical context and life experience may play a vital role. Similarly, for Q8, Q14-17, intersectionality, and gender roles could further affect responses to such questions. These may signal that age plays a significant role in shaping individuals' views on gender equality. For the questions that the age group of less than 40 scored higher, responses may clearly reveal that this age group can explicitly identify gender-based social biases and inequalities within the political arena. This could be an echo that younger generations may be more heightened to sensitivity and awareness of gender biases and inequalities. This could be

attributed to their increased exposure to social issues via social media, education, and involvement in social initiatives on a local level. It is important to mention that all the respondents in Q5 strongly disagreed with the idea that they usually feel that male candidates are better qualified. This may indicate a general awareness that candidates' qualifications may not be related to gender but to their competences applied in their respective fields.

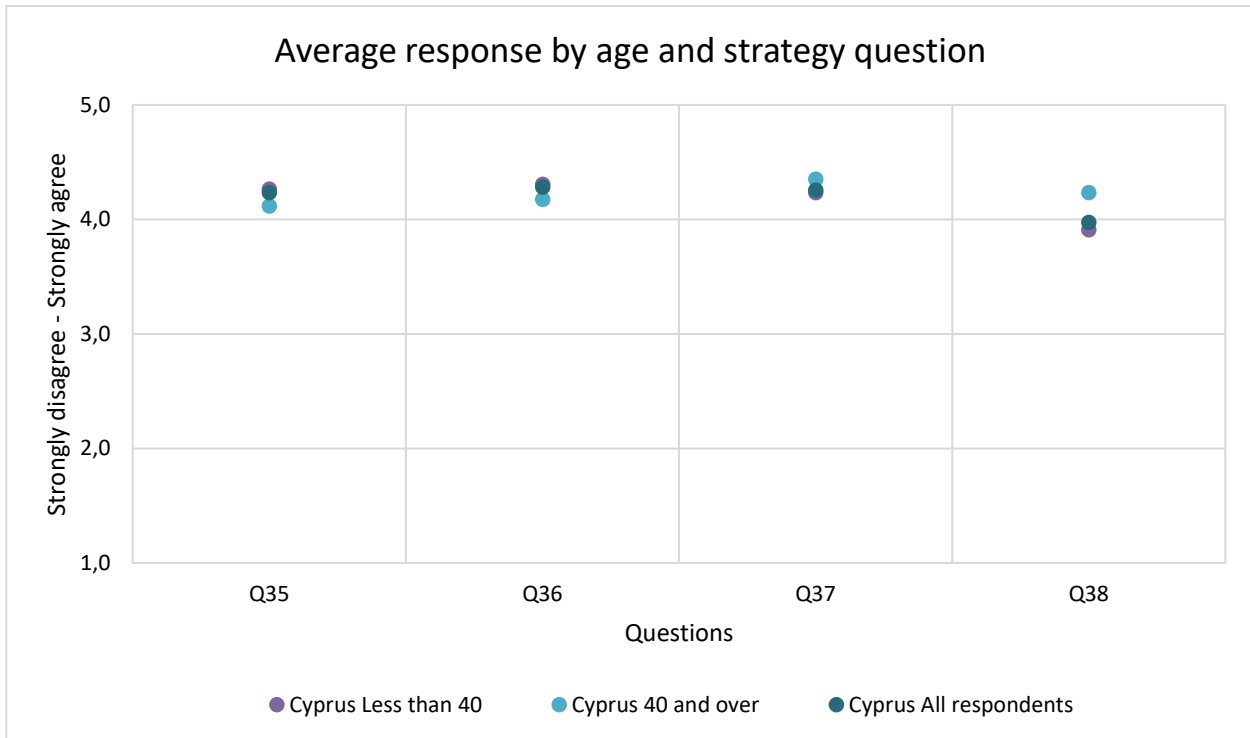


Barrier-related questions with a positive relationship with equality (Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q20, Q27, Q31, Q32, and Q33). Respondents under 40 leaned more on agreement/strongly agreement on Q4 (women being as capable as men in political leadership roles), Q6 (the importance of diverse representation) and Q13 (women frequently occupying leadership positions by women in workplaces or communities). This may reflect that younger generations have more confidence in the leadership abilities of women and believes that there are no significant differences between the two genders in politics. This further reflects their attitude and awareness around gender-related issues. On the other hand, respondents aged over 40 years old, seemed to have scored higher on Q10 (the presence of more women in political leadership positions would inspire other women to pursue political careers) Q11 (identification of female political role models in my country) and Q27 (political organisations should actively promote women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality). The results of these questions, reveal an overall positive interpretation of female inclusion in politics as well as an overall recognition of the abilities and capabilities of women within the political sphere. The following set of questions, referring to societal attitudes, cultural norms, and media influence, also show greater agreement by respondents over 40. More specifically, for Q32 (there are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in my community)

and Q33 (the media portrays women politicians fairly and accurately). The greatest gap is identified in Q31 (the cultural norms in my country support women’s participation in politics). The results of these three questions may reveal a great generational gap that mirrors the social-issues-understanding level of different age groups in the context of society, culture and media. Such results highlight the perceptions of gender issues based on age that further reflect the different perspectives in absorbing reality, the lack of valid information or the misinformation conquering society around the theme of equality. This may suggest a greater understanding, a greater holistic approach and openness to gender equality and national practices in favour of women in politics is expressed and practiced by younger generations.



Respondents' answers to Q9. There was a slight agreement in the responses to Question 9 between the two age groups; A slight difference in results was recorded with people aged over 40 to express further agreement than respondents less than 40. Both groups revealed a tendency of agreement for this question; that men and women possess distinct leadership styles. This may reveal that age may not strongly impact the perception of different leadership styles between genders.

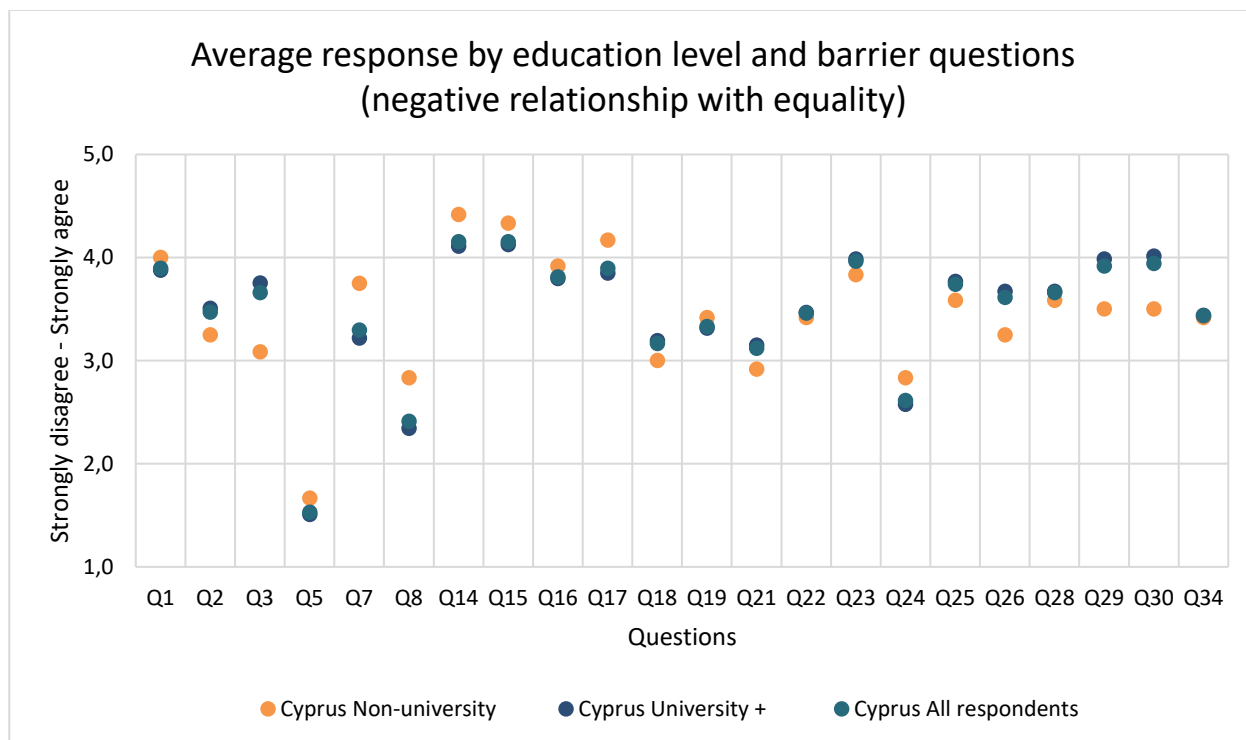


Respondents' answers to questions related to strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38). Respondents less than 40, showed a tendency to agree more strongly with the proposed strategies to increase women's representation in leadership roles from a young age (Q35) and to enact diversity and inclusion measures within both the workplace and the realm of politics (Q36). This might indicate an anticipatory stance towards attaining gender equality among the younger cohorts. However, respondents 40 and over are more in favour of the implementation of practices supporting women in politics, such as the provision of mentorships and support for women in leadership positions (Q37) and the engagement in awareness raising campaigns (Q38). The results may reveal that younger generations express stronger agreements on more legislative strategies, that will be set and applied on a national level, aiming for a greater, deeper and a holistic change and shift of inequality between genders. Whereas older generations focus more on local level strategies aligning with the level of engagement in gender equality issues, often adopted through parties' initiatives and localised efforts.

Overall difference in responses by age:

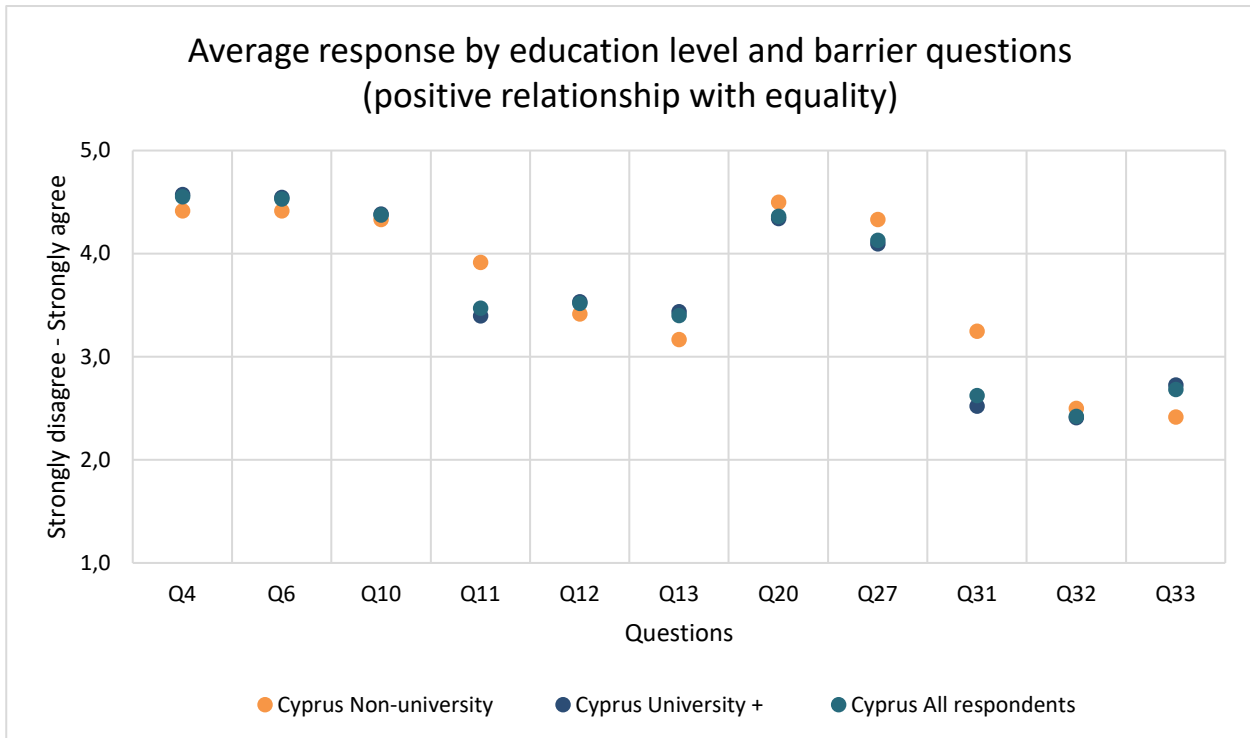
In general, the results highlight that age significantly influences the individuals' perspectives on gender equality as well as a significant generational gap in understanding social issues related to gender inequality. Younger generations exhibit gender inequality in politics with greater sensitivity, awareness of gender biases and inequalities and openness to gender equality legislative practices. Older generations revealed that they have different perspectives influenced by societal norms and the lack validation or invalidation of such social issue. Such difference may be justified due to the greater influence of education, media and active involvement in social initiatives.

5.4.4. Interpretation of results by educational level:



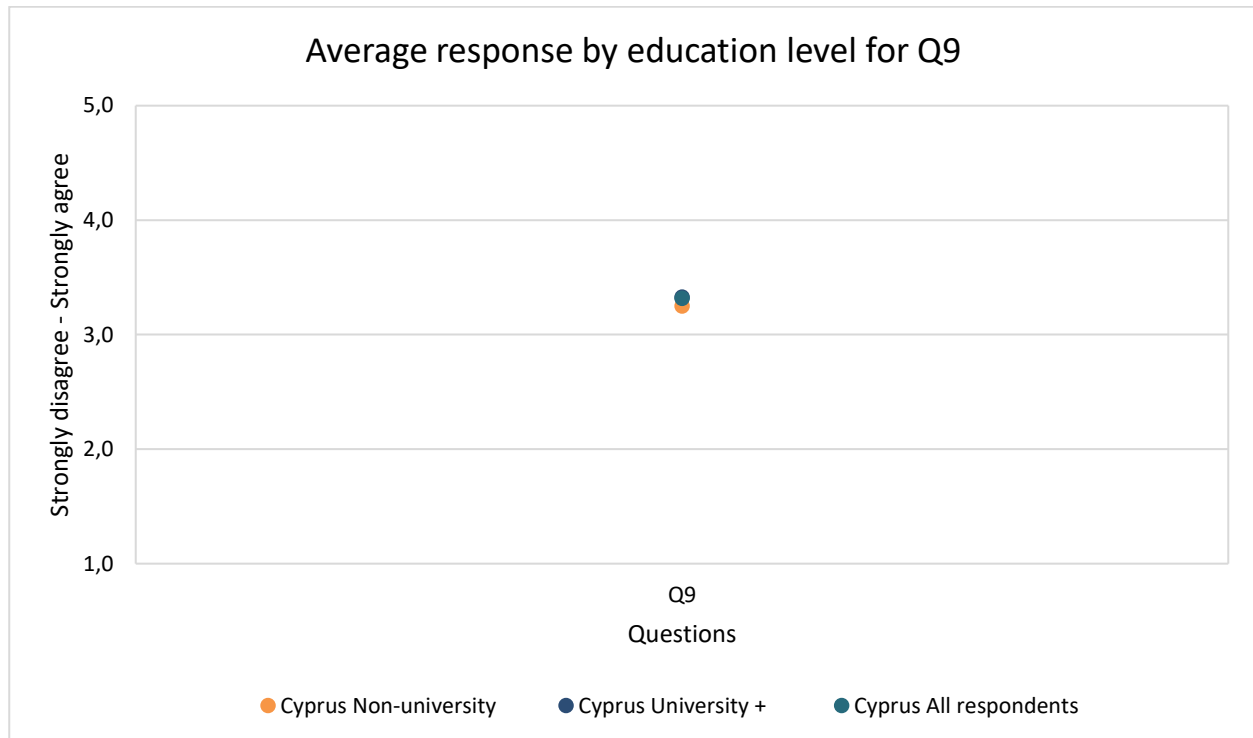
Respondents' answers to barrier-related questions with a negative relationship with equality (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q30, and Q34). Across most questions, individuals with university education and beyond (UNI+) tend to exhibit a slightly stronger agreement with the statements. This may suggest a heightened awareness of gender biases and stereotypes in politics compared to those with non-university education. This may be due to a potential link between education and attitudes towards the statements addressing negative relationship with education, further suggesting that those with university education and beyond, may be associated with a greater alignment with such statements. On the other hand, there were also questions that respondents with non-university education leaned to further agreement rather than people with university education and beyond. Specifically, this was identified in Q1, Q15, Q17, Q21, Q24. This pattern is observed in questions related to stereotypes, double standards, women's abilities, personal life choices, appearance-based judgments, work-life balance, and experience of sexual harassment that falls under systemic barriers. These could suggest that individuals without university education may have more pronounced awareness of agreement with gender-related biases. A great gap in the responses of the two categories was identified in Q3, Q7, Q8, Q26, Q29, Q30; where Q7 (I have witnessed or experienced gender bias or discrimination in politics) and Q8 (I have felt discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of my gender), higher responses were identified from people without university degrees, that again may highlight that they might be more likely to perceive gender-related obstacles, emphasising potential disparities according to the education background, experience and perception of the individuals around gender discrimination and bias. For the rest of the questions: Q3 (women often feel the

need to downplay their femininity or adopt more masculine traits to be taken seriously as leaders), Q26 (Women in political organisations are often limited to administrative roles instead of decision-making positions), Q29 (Societal norms and expectations limit women's political aspirations and opportunities) and Q30 (Traditional gender roles and expectations discourage women from pursuing political careers), responses were higher from individuals with university education. This pattern may be recognised to their educational background, that could have forced them to greater exposure to gender-related discussion, critical thinking, and deeper understanding on how the societal norms and expectations may limit women's opportunities and roles in politics. Focusing on Q3 specifically, where the greatest gap seems to be identified, we may understand that respondents with university background could be more likely to acknowledge and agree with the statement. This may reveal that, due to their education exposure, a greater awareness and sensitivity to gender-related challenges and stereotypes may have been achieved. A low number in responses was recorded from all participants, for Q5 (usually feel male candidates are better qualified), an opinion that was mutually formed from national experience of male candidates as well as an overall awareness of gender equality, explicitly highlighted in the statement of Q5. Lastly, there were a couple of questions that all participants scored the same response or a very similar one, indicating that, leaning to agreement with the statements expressing a negative relationship with equality. This could suggest the overall recognition of gender biases, discriminations and challenges.

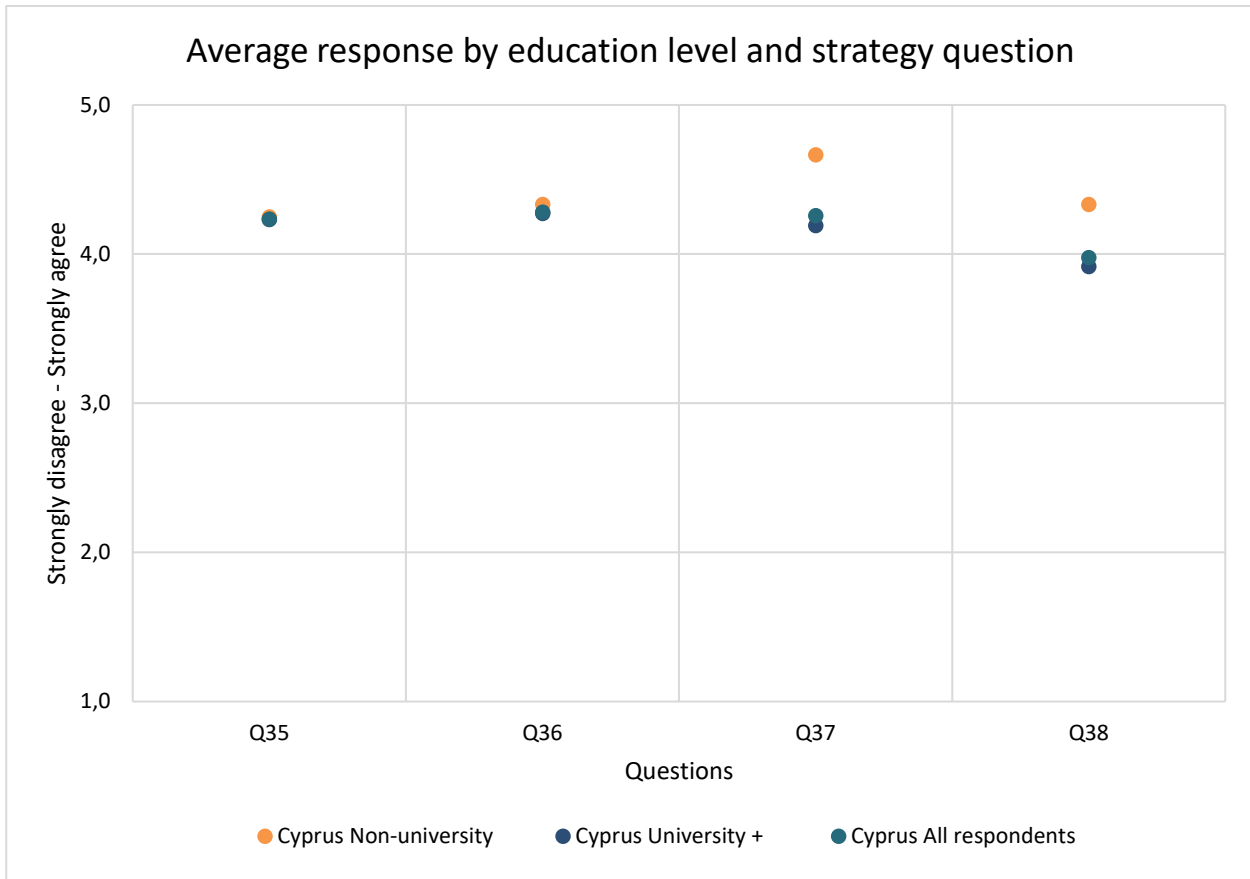


Respondents' answers to barrier-related questions with a positive relationship with equality (Q4, Q6, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q20, Q27, Q31, Q32, and Q33). In general, respondents with university background leaned more onto agreement with statements positively associated with equality. Specifically this is understood in Q4 (women are as capable as men in political leadership roles), Q6 (having diverse representation in leadership positions is important) Q10 (the presence of more women in political leadership positions would inspire other women to pursue political careers), Q12 (I have had a female role model or mentor in a leadership position who inspired or supported me), Q13 (Women frequently occupy leadership positions in my workplace or community) and Q33 (The media in my country portrays women politicians fairly and accurately). This may signify a greater support to initiatives that promote gender diversity, equality in leadership and overall women's involvement in politics. Thus, such responses can show an increased endorsement of gender equality principles and a stronger belief in the significance and capabilities of women in the political leadership roles. For the rest of the questions: Q20 (Political organisations should implement family-friendly policies to support women's participation), Q27 (Political organisations should actively promote women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality), Q32 (There are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in my community), higher scores were recorded from respondents without a university background. This may reveal that there is a strong perception on gender biases and stereotypes faced by women in politics. Such responses mirror a recognition of the need on gender equality supported by policies and the active promotion in enhancing women's participation in politics and leadership. It is worth noting that the greatest gaps were recorded for Q11 (I can easily identify female political role models in my country) and Q31 (The cultural norms in my country support women's participation in politics), where individuals without university background recorded higher these questions in comparison with individuals with a university background. This may reveal that individuals with a university background have

approached these questions with a more analytical and holistic perspective, taking into consideration broader societal contexts and structural factors that intervene and influence gender equality in politics. In contrast, individuals without university background may have developed a more localised perspective and thus understanding on female roles, that may result to perceive their cultural norms more supportive to women whilst identifying female role models more easily.



Respondents answers to Q9. Q9 (Men and women have different leadership styles) received almost the same scores from participants with university background and without university background. This may imply to a mutual understanding of both groups displaying subtle variations in their leadership styles, where leaderships skills are not perceived as inherently tied to an individual's gender. reflecting an overall growing recognition of gender equality issues.



Respondents' answers to questions related to strategies (Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38). Both groups expressed a rather strong agreement with the strategies put forth to enhance the representation of women in leadership roles. Specifically, for Q35 (women should be encouraged to pursue leadership roles from a young age) all participants marked the statement with the same score. For Q36 (implementation of diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics), similar scores were recorded from both groups. The greatest gaps were identified in Q37 (provision of mentorship and support for women in leadership positions) and Q38 (engagements in awareness raising campaigns), where people without a university background seemed to lean more on agreeing strongly with the statements. This might indicate a slightly more pronounced conviction in taking proactive steps to advance gender equality, that may further reveal the influence by life experiences and perspectives. Participants without a university background may have formed their opinion based on practical experience and community engagement, resulting to the acknowledgement of the great need of mentorship, support programmes and awareness raising campaigns. On the other hand, respondents with a university background, may have approached these statements with more critical and holistic viewpoint, that fall beyond their personal experiences. Overall, the results reveal that there is an overall consensus across both groups on the importance of women participation and engagement in politics and leadership.

Overall difference in responses by educational level:

Summarising, the analysis illustrated the influence of educational background on respondents' perceptions of gender equality and women leadership in politics. People with university background exhibited a greater awareness of gender biases and stereotypes, highlighting a more holistic social point of view, and the existence of social complexities. Respondents' responses without university background, may emphasised on practical experience and community engagement. Despite the variations, both groups emphasised ton the importance of gender equality, and initiatives enhancing women's participation; aiming for politics to become a space of equality for both genders.

5.5. Results of open-ended questions

When asked *Q.30 "Are there any other barriers or challenges that you believe hinder women's participation and election in politics? Please explain."* The respondents mentioned a variety of challenges that impede women's participation in politics:

- The **patriarchal structure** of the society.
- Education, culture, social interpretation, patriarchy.
- Family, patriarchy, **capitalist system**.
- The main reason is the social stereotypes in our country, which in recent years they have started changing positively.
- Motherhood. Due to **the lack of childcare-related infrastructure** (or its provision at high financial cost) combined social perception that women have been a greater role in childcare, women face greater barriers to participation in politics.
- **Patriarchal concepts**.
- **Role within the family** and the lack of a legal framework that protects mothers to continue their political activism unhindered.
- Pregnancy.
- **Prevailing prejudices**, stereotypes, they believe that a woman who chooses a career has neither the right nor the choice of family-motherhood. If a woman has progressed in politics or anywhere else, it is because she has either used her beauty or has dishonestly earned her position. Even even women have similar beliefs to men about women in leadership positions which should concern us as a society.
- To offer **practical support** to mothers involved within the political sphere.
- Her added/increased **responsibilities for her family** due to the absence of men in such responsibilities.
- The **absence of state structures** and/or for the elderly and or/disabled.
- Social circles that facilitate the promotion of men politicians
- There is still a **male dominance** and a woman among them, who must maintain an attitude of obedience rather than offering leadership initiatives and change.
- Women's sexuality being considered taboo, leading society to use it as a weapon against female political leaders.
- Guidance (brainwash), especially from church/religion from an early age **about the position a woman 'should' have in the society**.
- **Lack of visibility** of women's political campaigns in the media.
- The **dual role** of the woman as a mother and an employee/worker.
- Stereotypes, prejudices, **lack of awareness** and relevant skills.
- A lot of times, the constraints and challenges can also result amongst women themselves. There is more competition among women than among men, especially in the political arena where there are limited positions for women. Women themselves are sometimes

more competitive with another female candidate than with another male candidate. So instead of encouraging each other, they compete with each other, and both limit their chances.

- Stereotypes
- Unfortunately, we as women do not support women either. **Stereotypes**, hinder the judgments and decisions of women and men alike.
- The depreciation/**discouragement of politics by society**.

Open comments have highlighted barriers, ranging from societal norms to structural issues as well as the barriers introduced through the surveys. Participants have also added issues relevant to the capitalistic system, patriarchy, religion, the lack of state infrastructures regarding childcare, the role of a woman and the meaning of family and the woman-to-woman support. All points stated, result to the barriers women face, limiting or challenging participation in politics. The input from respondents in open-ended questions are highly coincidental with the responses given by focus group participants.

Responses about **Q.40**. *“In your opinion, what can be done to address these barriers and promote gender equality in politics? Please share your ideas or suggestions*, were as follows:

- To **de-standardise/** de-stereotype gender as a factor taken into account for choosing a profession or for recruitment or position/job assignment.
- **Legislation** and actions planned that will eliminate discrimination against women.
- **Amendments in policies**, going back to perceptions--thus targeting education.
- **Education** from early ages regarding this, introduced from school in order to be embedded in the family in combination with assortment/claiming by women, mobility from women and women promotion.
- **Setting rules and policies** stating that there should be a percentage of participation from different gender eg. 30-70.
- A **comprehensive policy** by the state to ensure that women mothers do not have additional burdens compared to men.
- **Reform of education** to address all the stereotypes that exist.
- Legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.
- Curricula in primary and secondary schools
- Education: socio-political changes that will strike at the root of the problem away from quota logic.
- From early child period, children's education should focus on gender equality that breaks down patriarchal stereotypes.
- Better education
- **Change the system**.
- To begin with, the example of the President of the Parliament is quite encouraging because we see a woman standing worthily in such a position. Of course, there are comments from

the people, but it is a big step. I do not think that there should be a compulsory number of people who should be voted for because then it becomes a force. If a woman can have the skills and capabilities, she should be voted, not just be placed by the parties to show they have equality. There are too many deserving women to represent the citizen of Cyprus and I believe that these messages should be transmitted from **childhood in schools** etc. and as the new generation grows up, they should finally embrace new beliefs away from prejudice. (visits to parliament from schools, workshops, examples from European countries etc.)

- More women in politics will **encourage** more younger women to be involved.
- Education from school. Awareness campaigns. Changing the norm.
- Make it socially acceptable that women are perfectly capable of performing the role of political leaders. In school, children should learn what gender stereotypes are and how they can prevent them from affecting their lives. Also, equal numbers of women and men should be recruited into politics so that women would be encouraged and interested in politics.
- **Equal duties and equal responsibilities.**
- Actions to **eliminate** gender stereotypes/Empower men of different age groups/Empowerment of men of different age groups/Activities to raise awareness that gender equality is a human rights issue/More welfare state to support parenthood.
- Everything starts with eliminating gender stereotypes from a very young age! in the family and in the school environment. From there on, supporting girls and women throughout their minor and adult life with mentoring, providing examples of women role models etc.
- Creation of **state structures** for the above as well as the detection, training and promotion of mainly women who are or would like to become involved in politics.
- The **formation of political parties** that should adhere to a specific minimum number of women and the active participation of them in the decision making that is relevant to women's rights, benefits at work, health, medical and other issues that are directly and only relevant to them.
- Women themselves sabotage women candidates and instead of having a supportive group, the opposite occurs; you need to prove twice your worth.
- **Women supporting women.** Unfortunately, misogyny is ingrained in women in our society just as much as men.
- It's hard to change a culture. Perhaps **information/ guidance at an early age**, to stop women being afraid or believing that they are not capable, in all aspects of their lives!
- Promote grassroot/crowd-funding approaches so that women aspiring politicians can run a financially sustainable campaign. **Promote** the importance of volunteering in these campaigns, as well as properly equipping women aspiring politicians to manage and direct a team of individuals who can support their campaigns and/or their achievements as elected officials.
- To present **more role models** of women in key positions, to show younger women that they can be active in politics in key positions.
- Education from a very early age

- **Women's empowerment and mutual encouragement campaigns.** Most campaigns are actually directed at men, to raise awareness among men, whereas they should also focus on women, so that they can understand that the emergence of any woman in a leadership role or the success of a woman in the political arena is a victory for all women. A sense of solidarity among women, of mutual encouragement and the belief that yes, women can, and all women should, encourage and support women's participation should be strengthened. That is, not to support a woman because she is just a woman but not to "fight" her because she is just a woman.
- Let society choose a woman as president of the republic of Cyprus!
- Equality should be cultivated in the family first. Unfortunately, there is a long way to go in schools and it is essential that teachers overcome prejudices and stereotypes. Their role in gender equality is very essential.
- We must stop separating men and women and focus on the human being.
- Better plans for motherhood so that a mother can have a leading position either at work or in politics.

Open comments have highlighted commonly highlighted the importance of education as a main step eliminating or contributing to the elimination of gender stereotypes, patriarchal practices, voluntary participation of women in politics and an increased number of women participants. Reference to legislations, state infrastructures and motherhood plans were also noted, that would help to combat stereotypes. Lastly, different perspective regarding quotas were also noted, with some participants being in favour of and some being against it-with the suggestion of improving education to influence women participation in politics, reaching higher numbers. The input from respondents in open-ended questions are highly coincidental with the responses given by focus group participants.

Extra comments included general additional comments about the current situation (eg. has been improved, but there is still room for improvement), comments about the combination of factors such as age and gender (eg. A young man will experience less ageism than a young woman). Indeed, many times a young man will be promoted by older male politicians as their "protégé" or "successor", but rarely will the same be true for young women and comments on comprehension issues of statements identified in the questionnaire. Lastly, participants, including prior Equality Inspector at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, congratulated the consortium of the initiative and the program, contributing to the more general effort in involving more women in decision-making centres.

5.6. Conclusions regarding questionnaire results

In summary, the questionnaire results provide valuable insights into the perceptions and attitudes of respondents, of different political affiliations, regarding gender bias and gender equality in politics. While there were variations in responses, there was a consensus on the need for strategies to address these issues. These differences reflect the complex interplay of personal beliefs and societal norms within the political landscape. A vibrant example was the particular emphasis placed on a specific political affiliation, underlying their broader political ideology as revealed from the overall responses. A central position gender-neutral approaches, systemic bias remediation, and the promotion of equal opportunities is a central idea supported by this political affiliation, greatly and widely supported by all participants who identify themselves within this political affiliation. The focus on collective efforts to combat inequality, promote social justice, and implement comprehensive solutions to societal challenges was also observant and a key point to be highlighted, as greatly revealed from the responses. In accordance with that, a great understanding and emphasis regarding gender biases and inequalities in politics, as well as the need to address these issues, highlighted from these supporters as well as from people supporting other political parties.

Overall, gender-based differences in perceptions of barriers, biases, leadership styles, and strategies related to gender equality in politics were observed, specifically, the data also reveals that women generally display a higher inclination to identify obstacles to gender equality and endorse measures to achieve it, possibly stemming from personal experiences or heightened sensitivity to gender biases. Conversely, men, while acknowledging these barriers, tend to have a somewhat more positive perspective on gender equality in politics, potentially shaped again by gender and life experiences.

Furthermore, age plays a significant role in shaping perspectives on gender equality, highlighting a notable generational gap in understanding social issues related to gender inequality. Younger generations demonstrate greater sensitivity, awareness of biases, and openness to gender equality legislative practices. In contrast, older generations may be influenced by societal norms and less exposure to the validation or invalidation of these social issues, and thus showing to have a greater understanding of women's abilities in politics due to the less exposure and awareness of gender biases and their influences. Both age groups recognised the importance of strategies to promote gender equality.

Educational background also emerges as a significant influencer of respondents' perceptions, with those having a university education exhibiting greater awareness of gender biases and stereotypes and emphasizing a more comprehensive social perspective. On the other hand,

respondents without a university background may place more emphasis on practical experience and community engagement. Both groups agreed on the importance of women's participation in politics.

Lastly, the analysis underscores the importance of gender equality and women's leadership in politics. The open comments provided by respondents highlight various barriers, including societal norms, structural issues, and challenges introduced through surveys, as well as broader factors such as the influence of the capitalist system, patriarchy, religion, and the lack of state infrastructures related to childcare and family roles. These findings collectively point to the complex landscape of gender inequality in politics and the need for multifaceted strategies to address it comprehensively. The convergence of open-ended responses with focus group participant feedback further validates the significance of these issues in the context of gender equality in politics.

It's essential to exercise caution when interpreting the questionnaire results, as the sample composition may introduce biases, notably the overrepresentation of female respondents. Nonetheless, these findings offer valuable insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences concerning women's political engagement in Cyprus.

The analysis of questionnaire results offers a comprehensive and nuanced view of how perceptions of gender bias and equality in politics are influenced by various factors, including political affiliation, gender, age, and education. While differences in perspectives exist, a unifying understanding of an active commitment to address gender inequality in the political sphere is evident across diverse backgrounds and affiliations. The results They provide a foundational resource for future research and initiatives dedicated to addressing barriers and promoting increased female representation in politics. These findings underscore the pressing need for collective efforts to combat gender biases, promote social justice, and implement inclusive strategies to overcome the multifaceted challenges surrounding gender equality in politics.

6. Summary of key findings and national-specific recommendations

In conclusion, drawing from both the questionnaire results and focus group discussions, the following recommendations-in the form of legislating procedures- aim to enhance gender equality in Cyprus politics.

- **Education and Awareness:** Advance education and awareness of gender equality from early childhood. Disseminate information challenging societal attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs where experienced women politicians mentor and guide aspiring female leaders. This can provide valuable support and encouragement for women entering the political arena.
- **Political Education Programs:** Develop educational programs that focus on political literacy and encourage women to participate in politics. These programs can provide information on the political process, leadership skills, and the importance of civic engagement.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of gender equality in politics and the benefits of women's representation. These campaigns can help change societal attitudes and norms.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs where experienced women politicians mentor and guide aspiring female leaders. This can provide valuable support and encouragement for women entering the political arena.
- **Comprehensive Training:** Provide training in gender-related topics and essential skills like public speaking and media management. Address biases and promote empathy through training for both men and women.
- **Supportive Infrastructure:** Establish supportive infrastructures like childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, and financial assistance to enable women's active participation in politics while maintaining work-life balance.
- **Corporate Engagement:** Encourage corporations to support women's participation in politics by providing paid leave for political activities, sponsoring women's leadership development programs, and promoting gender diversity in their own leadership.
- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Implement gender-responsive budgeting at all levels of government to ensure that policies and budgets consider the specific needs and priorities of women. This can help address gender disparities in various areas, including healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.

- **Empowering Environments:** Develop inclusive environments that allow women to have their voices heard and actively participate in decision-making roles. Promote early involvement of young girls in politics.
- **Quotas and Inclusivity:** Implement quotas to ensure women's active involvement in politics. Encourage political organisations to create inclusive environments for women, even without relying solely on quotas.
- **Political Party Reforms:** Encourage political parties to implement internal reforms that promote gender equality, such as setting targets for women's representation in party leadership positions and candidate selections.
- **Role Model Promotion:** Create and promote diverse women role models in politics, highlighting their achievements and contributions to inspire both women and men in politics.
- **Media Representation:** Encourage balanced gender representation in media, emphasizing women's political expertise and contributions over appearance.

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8. Annex 1: Questionnaire Items

Q1 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Stereotypes about women's abilities hinder their progress in politics.]

Q2 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women in politics are often perceived as emotional rather than rational decision-makers.]

Q3 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women often feel the need to downplay their femininity or adopt more masculine traits to be taken seriously as leaders.]

Q4 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women are as capable as men in political leadership roles.]

Q5 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I usually feel men candidates are better qualified.]

Q6 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Having diverse representation in leadership positions is important.]

Q7 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have witnessed or experienced gender bias or discrimination in politics.]

Q8 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have felt discouraged from pursuing a leadership role because of my gender.]

Q9 Regarding gender bias and stereotypes faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Men and women have different leadership styles.]

Q10 Regarding role models of women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [The presence of more women in political leadership positions would inspire other women to pursue political careers.]

Q11 Regarding role models of women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I can easily identify women political role models in my country.]

Q12 Regarding role models of women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have had a women role model or mentor in a leadership position who inspired or supported me.]

Q13 Regarding role models of women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women frequently occupy leadership positions in my workplace or community.]

Q14 Regarding double standards and scrutiny faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women in politics are judged more harshly for their appearance than men.]

Q15 Regarding double standards and scrutiny faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women politicians are more likely to be criticized for their personal life choices compared to men.]

Q16 Regarding double standards and scrutiny faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women are held to higher standards or face more scrutiny than men in leadership roles.]

Q17 Regarding double standards and scrutiny faced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women in leadership face a "double bind" where they are expected to be both assertive and nurturing.]

Q18 Regarding work-life balance experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [It is more challenging for women in politics to maintain a healthy work-life balance in relation to other career choices.]

Q19 Regarding work-life balance experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [It is more challenging for women in politics to maintain a healthy work-life balance in relation to their men counterparts.]

Q20 Regarding work-life balance experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Political organizations should implement family-friendly policies to support women's participation.]

Q21 Regarding work-life balance experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have felt that I had to choose between family responsibilities and pursuing a leadership role.]

Q22 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Wage disparities between men and women politicians exist in my country.]

Q23 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women in politics face more hostile work environments, including sexism and discrimination, than their men counterparts.]

Q24 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or in politics.]

Q25 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions compared to men with similar qualifications and experience.]

Q26 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Women in political organizations are often limited to administrative roles instead of decision-making positions.]

Q27 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Political organizations should actively promote women to decision-making roles to achieve gender equality.]

Q28 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [I have seen women being talked over or interrupted in meetings or discussions more frequently than their men counterparts.]

Q29 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Societal norms and expectations limit women's political aspirations and opportunities.]

Q30 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Traditional gender roles and expectations discourage women from pursuing political careers.]

Q31 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [The cultural norms in my country support women's participation in politics.]

Q32 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [There are equal opportunities for women and men to pursue leadership roles in my community.]

Q33 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [The media in my country portrays women politicians fairly and accurately.]

Q34 Regarding other barriers experienced by women in politics, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Media coverage of women in politics often focuses on their appearance rather than their achievements and qualifications.]

Q35 In order to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, we should... [...encourage women to pursue leadership roles from a young age.]

Q36 In order to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, we should... [...implement diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace and in politics.]

Q37 In order to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, we should... [...provide mentorship and support for women in leadership positions.]

Q38 In order to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, we should... [...engage in awareness raising campaigns.]

Open-ended question: Are there any other barriers or challenges that you believe hinder women's participation and election in politics? Please explain.

Open-ended question: In your opinion, what can be done to address these barriers and promote gender equality in politics? Please share your ideas or suggestions.

9. Annex 2: Focus Groups Questions

Questions to validate hypothesis:

- In what ways do you think gender bias or stereotypes might impact the political careers or aspirations of women?
- How do you think the presence or absence of women role models in politics influences the career choices or motivations of women interested in pursuing a political career?
- Do you believe that women in politics are held to different standards or face more scrutiny than their men counterparts? If so, can you provide examples or share your observations?
- What challenges do you think women might face in balancing work and family responsibilities while pursuing a political career?
- Can you discuss any systemic barriers, such as preferential treatment, hostile work environments (sexism, discrimination, etc.), or wage differences for similar responsibilities, which might limit the career progression of women in politics?
- In political organizations, do you think women are more likely to take on administrative or supportive roles instead of decision-making positions? If so, how do you think this impacts women's overall representation in politics?
- Questions for the focus group to identify additional barriers:
- Are there any specific challenges or barriers you have faced in your political career that we have not discussed yet and that you would like to share?
- How do you think societal attitudes or cultural norms in your country impact women's participation in politics?
- In your opinion, what role does the media play in shaping the public's perception of women in leadership positions?
- In your experience, how does access to funding or resources for political campaigns differ between men and women candidates?
- Questions to identify strategies to address barriers hindering women's participation in politics:
- In your opinion, what are some effective measures or initiatives that can help challenge gender bias and stereotypes in politics?

- How can political parties or organizations better support and promote women into leadership positions and decision-making roles?
- What type of training, mentorship, or support programs would you find valuable in overcoming the identified barriers in your political career?
- How can we create a more inclusive and supportive environment within political organizations that fosters gender equality and encourages women's participation?
- What role do you think men can play in promoting gender equality in politics and supporting women's political participation?

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