ACTIVE.ALL
Guidelines for the elimination of stereotypes, and strengthening of gender equality
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About the Guidelines

Gender stereotypes are one of the main obstacles to achieving actual gender equality. Combating gender stereotypes is a marathon; results and progress are not seen immediately. Prejudice and stereotypes probably cannot be completely eradicated or eliminated, at least not quickly. As society develops and changes, new prejudice and stereotypes emerge. However, we may become aware of them and change or overcome them. We may also choose to make our reactions and behaviour the result of conscious decisions, and not to express and deepen stereotypes and prejudice with our behaviour.

In addition to our private lives (e.g. as parents, partners), an important role in preventing and eliminating stereotypes and prejudice, and strengthening gender equality is also played by numerous institutions and their professionals (e.g. in the field of education, social security, health care, local self-government), employers and unions. This manual focuses in more detail on work-life balance, promoting active fatherhood, and raising awareness of stereotypes related to the aforementioned topics. It is meant to prompt people into thinking about how stereotypes shape our lives, where we encounter them and how our actions can challenge them.

The manual does not provide fixed recipes, but it is intended to communicate an important message: to improve the situation, we only need to be gender sensitive – to pay attention, and not to bring stereotypes about what men should do and what women should do into our work. Instead, we should enable both men and women to fully exploit their potential and talents, regardless of the fact that they might not comply with traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women.
What are stereotypes?

“The people from Gorenjska are stingy.”
“Dogs are loyal animals.”
“French people’s favourite dish is snails.”
“Violence is only committed by men from lower social classes.”
“The Germans are hard-working, and the Swiss are thorough.”

The aforementioned statements are stereotypical. Why? Because they are based on limited information or unverified facts, are generalised and not necessarily accurate. Stereotypes are not necessarily untrue, but they are blind spots which hamper objective and carefree thinking and behaviour. They merely highlight certain generalised characteristics of people, social groups or communities, but neglect the differences between them and between individuals.

Most stereotypes arise from the need to simplify complex phenomena. We create them on a daily basis to describe and justify social differences between social, ethical, generational, gender, religious and political groups. Stereotypes are created by characteristics being attributed to people on the basis of their membership of a certain group rather than on the basis of their individual characteristics and special features. Therefore, members of a certain group are perceived as more similar to, and different from, members of another group than they actually are. Stereotypes do not correspond to reality, but they do influence our perception of other groups and persons. Although, for example, violence is committed by men from lower social classes, this does not mean that men from upper social classes do not commit violence to the same extent. Nor does it mean that violence is committed by all men from lower social classes. The same is true of the stereotype of the proverbially hard-working Germans and the thoroughness of the Swiss – we cannot attribute these characteristics to the entire male population of these two countries. At first sight, stereotypes do simplify our lives. But they are nevertheless standardised judgements which do not apply to all people, if anyone. They are selective in terms of value and motivation, and facilitate the emergence of social prejudice. This means that we use stereotypes to quickly establish a distance from a group to which we do not belong, and generally attribute to it inferior characteristics compared to the group to which we do belong. Since we tend to believe in the superiority of ‘our’ group, we tend to treat a group to which we do not belong in a biased and discriminatory manner.
What are gender stereotypes?

“A real woman takes care of her children, husband and home without any problems.”
“A man who cooks and cleans is hen-pecked.”
“Women are poor drivers.”
“Men are born to be leaders.”

The foregoing statements are gender stereotypes; we are frequently not aware of them, but we accept them as self-evident and behave accordingly. They are present everywhere: in families, kindergartens, schools, leisure activities, at work, in the media, in politics, culture etc.

Gender stereotypes include generalised characteristics, and are a reflection of how men and women, the differences between them and their social roles are perceived. For example, women are supposedly gentle, emotional, kind, sensitive, caring etc., while men are strong, brave, dominant, influencing, sensible etc. Gender stereotypes, which are formed by conclusions about the behaviour, skills, interests of other persons merely on the basis of their gender, result in an unreal and unfair notion of men and women. In real life, neither all women nor all men correspond to the descriptions above. The reasons for the differences in the behaviour of women and men may be sought in socialisation, culture, lowest presence and poorer visibility of women or men in various professions, activities etc. One of the problems with gender stereotypes is that they attempt to show social differences between genders as the consequence of natural differences, i.e. it is ‘natural’ for men to choose technical professions more frequently, while women choose care-related professions etc.

We enter the world of gender stereotypes when we are born or in early childhood by attributing certain stereotypes to certain people, and other stereotypes to others. It is still a generally held belief still believes that boys and girls must be raised differently, that e.g. girls must be well-behaved, while boys are allowed more freedom solely because they are boys. Numerous products also affect the input of restrictive differences: there are pink and blue birthday cards, and e.g. blocks and even sweets (chocolate eggs) with packaging that communicates whether they are intended for girls or boys. Depending on the gender, children are then directed towards different toys and activities through which they practice their expected adult roles. Girls are given dolls, soft toys and miniature household
appliances which help them learn about being a mother and a housewife, while boys are given cars, blocks and guns, which promote logical and practical thinking and aggressive behaviour. Children also learn by imitating adults of the same gender, and the identification with their gender is additionally reinforced by addressing children with their gender ‘naughty boy’ or ‘good girl’ or “a boy must be strong, not a cry-baby”. Children are frequently not enrolled in various activities on the basis of their interest, but on the basis of a belief that certain things are more appropriate for boys and others for girls; boys are encouraged to play football, do skateboarding and judo, while girls are encouraged to do ballet, rhythmic gymnastics or dance in cheerleading groups. There is nothing wrong with this until the moment when a child wants to do something that is not typical of their gender, but we do not let them because it is not appropriate for their gender, or they do not get the opportunity (a girl cannot join a football class because they do not accept girls, but there is no special class for girls) or are laughed at (if a boy wants to attend a ballet class).

Socialisation affects a child’s learning about, and internalisation of, values, norms, expectations and social roles related to their gender. Differences in socialisation in turn affect how different social roles are formed. Excessive emphasis on the different social roles of genders generally leads to even stronger stereotypical ways of thinking, which may promote discrimination and growing social gender inequality.

Stereotypes are a preliminary phase of prejudice and promote their emergence. Stereotypes and prejudice are similar, but there are also important differences between them. Therefore, this topic is highlighted below.

What is a prejudice?

“Refugees are terrorists.”
“Blond women are stupid.”
“Immigrants steal jobs from us.”
“Feminists are masculine women.”

The foregoing statements are expressions of prejudice. Prejudice, much like a stereotype, is an unjustified, unsubstantiated and unverified point of view or erroneous judgement about people and groups, but unlike stereotypes, is accompanied by strong feelings. They arise from our tendency to draw conclusions too hastily, and result in distorted and unfair evaluations of persons, situations or ideas. They are limited to a few typical traits; prejudice may even be supported by insignificant physical characteristics such as hair colour, e.g. “blondes are dumb”, “men with big bellies are lazy”. Like stereotypes, prejudices are generally deep-rooted, and we are frequently not even aware of them. They are part of our everyday lives, which gives them power and influence. Prejudice is found in films, science, popular culture, media, literature, jobs, kindergartens, schools, families etc. It is expressed in everyday conversations, public speeches, jokes, ambiguities, lifestyle etc.
Prejudice is based on evaluations and assessments of individuals and social groups. We regard the group to which we belong as superior and attribute to it positive characteristics, whereas other groups are valued less or even attributed negative characteristics. This is shown in disrespectful, intolerant, humiliating or scornful attitudes to other people and persons who are different from us because they are members of other cultures, ethnic groups, races, live a different lifestyle, have different religious beliefs, are of different sexual orientation, gender etc. The prevailing group believes that they have more rights, power, privileges and higher status, which is threatened by the inferior and/or minority group. Therefore, prejudice is the source of numerous injustices, inequality, discrimination and the restriction of possibilities in life.

We have already mentioned that prejudice is accompanied by strong feelings. They make prejudice more dangerous and resistant to change than stereotypes. They trigger anger, hatred and aversion, but also a feeling of satisfaction. On the basis of a certain persons' prejudice, groups or minorities are treated as 'scapegoats', the only party guilty for the existing situation. We frequently use prejudices to justify aggression, systematic violence, discrimination and support for the existing balance of power and privileges. When a man and a woman who both meet all the requirements apply for a job, the employer eagerly claims that the woman, who is also very young, is not able to do this highly technical job, so the job should be given to the man.

Is prejudice harmful?

Stereotypes and prejudice affect how people think, feel and behave. They are expressed in various ways, which differ according to their degree and consequences. Everything may begin with discussion when one group, usually the one who thinks of itself as superior, making jokes about the other group or expressing aversion towards it. This may be followed by avoidance of mutual relationships and contacts between members of different groups. Avoidance may grow into discrimination aimed directly at members of certain groups. This has the effect of restricting human rights, access to goods and services, making education and employment options poorer etc. The next expression of prejudice is usually physical violence. Even in this day and age, we hear about participant of Pride parades in various countries being subjected to brutal attacks. The most extreme expression of prejudice is genocide. Even today, there are cases when whole groups or nations fall victim to persecution and extermination.

Prejudice may be used as a tool to justify the worst acts by a certain group which deems itself superior. Therefore, prejudice is harmful, and people must be made aware of it, and overcome it.

What is sex and what is gender?

Gender stereotypes and prejudice about men and women arise from the notion of gender. To understand why gender stereotypes and prejudice are harmful, why people must be made aware of, and overcome, them, we must draw a distinction between sex and gender.
Sex denotes those biological physical characteristics which divide people into women and men, and make us different. It is acquired at birth and can be changed only with medical treatment.

Gender denotes characteristics pertaining to masculinity and femininity. Gender is not universal, since the expectations and notions of different cultures about what men and women should be like, what is appropriate or inappropriate for either of them differ. Through the prism of history, we notice that certain expectations and notions have changed, which means that gender has changed in various periods. For example, a hundred years ago, it was unimaginable for women to have the right to vote, to study, to have short hair etc., while for men, it was unimaginable to talk about feelings, change children's nappies etc.

Certain characteristics seemingly typical of either women or men are often perceived as natural, biologically determined. But in reality, they are not; they are socially determined. One example is the belief that a woman must be, first and foremost, responsible for raising children and caring for the household. In this case, we cannot claim that this is determined by any of the biological characteristics of women. Nor do any of the biological characteristics determine that men should not be responsible for childcare and care for the household. Therefore, these are roles and responsibilities that are socially determined for women, which arises from the time when only men had jobs, while women took care of children and the household. The problem of this stereotypical view of femininity and masculinity is that a wide array of other expectations and/or limitations is related to them. For example, in an organisation where such a mindset prevails, a woman might not be able to take a leading position as long as she has young children; a man might not be able to take sick leave to care for a sick child, although he might want to. Due to gender and the stereotypical notion of their roles, both women and men will be limited, deprived, and perhaps even discriminated against.

The consequences of gender stereotypes and prejudice will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Here, we address the differences between sex and gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tr>
<td>Genitals.</td>
<td>Social structure of roles and responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women give birth and breastfeed.</td>
<td>Children may be bottle-fed by women and men alike.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women devote more time to ironing, cleaning and childcare than men.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men devote more time to paid work, sports activities and the internet than women.</td>
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The impact and consequences of gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes affect our expectations about behaviour, mindsets and feelings. They affect the identification of women and men with gender, and determine what is (in)appropriate and (un)acceptable for them. They can result in someone not becoming what they want, but what the surroundings or society expects. For example, a boy does not enrol in the secondary school of cosmetics because the social surroundings say that “this is not a job for a boy”, and a girl does not decide to study mechanical engineering because “girls have no business being there”. Men do not choose to work as teachers, carers or social workers, for example, but on the other hand, men still predominate in certain jobs and women decide not to do them, e.g. firefighter, pilot. The expectations of the community or society may affect a whole range of decisions, e.g. hobbies (we still hear that “football or boxing is not for girls”, that “real boys do not go to ballet classes”, that “real men do not watch emotional films”, that “women do not drive tractors”). We might say that social pressures and the desire to belong to a certain group lead to the suppression of personal desires.

Gender stereotypes also affect feelings and the expression of emotions. You probably remember when you were a child you heard that “it is inappropriate for good girls to be angry” or that “big boys do not cry”. Such messages convey that certain emotions are appropriate only for a certain gender. In adulthood, men and women do not show certain emotions. To begin with, they had to suppress them, then finally, they might not even feel them any longer. For example, men frequently do not show that they are unhappy or afraid, but they seem brave, which is undoubtedly stressful. Women, on the other hand, have problems expressing anger, which is also stressful and causes discrepancies between feeling and expression of feelings. Gender stereotypes also affect a person’s decision to seek help or not. Men still have a hard time seeking psychotherapeutic or psychiatric help when it is sensible and necessary.

Stereotypes affect the distribution of duties in families; men do not care for children and the household as much as women. Due to the social expectations that they should care for the home and children, women more frequently give up their career, use their leave to care for sick children and do more unpaid work than men. However, women are not the only ones suffering from the negative consequences of the pressure to meet social expectations. It is stereotypical to believe that men always have successful careers and are able to be the breadwinner in the family.

As we can see, gender stereotypes have many negative consequences which may be felt by girls and boys, men and women. The pressure to conform to social roles and expectations is equal for both genders. The media also play a role in creating this pressure. Gender stereotypes undoubtedly affect the media or people who create them. As a rule, the media present women and men through stereotypical social roles (e.g. women are always doing the laundry in detergent commercials, men drive more expensive cars, women cook, men appear in commercials for technical products etc.). In this way, the media maintain or even deepen gender stereotypes.
What does gender equality mean?

The concept of gender equality is not new, and a lot has been written about it. Why does equality still matter? Women and men are different. The reason we have to explain the concept again and again is that misunderstanding and/or wrong interpretations of this notion persist. Erroneous terms such as equal treatment and equivalence are still used to discuss gender equality. A correct understanding of gender equality is a prerequisite for a deeper understanding of gender stereotypes and prejudice. Therefore, these notions have to be defined continuously.

**Equal treatment** refers to the legal aspect of equality. The Slovenian Constitution and legislation provide the same human rights, fundamental freedoms and duties to all, regardless of gender. In the past, women and men were not treated equally, e.g. women were not allowed to vote. We may instantly overcome the stereotypical perception of women’s and men’s responsibility for childcare with the notion of equal treatment, since the law provides both with equal rights and duties to children. Legal and formal equity does not ensure actual equality of women and men, but it is its significant element.

**Being equal in value** refers to the valuation that one gender is equal to the other in terms of value. Value is not attributed to groups, e.g. women value men and vice versa, but also within groups, e.g. women value each other, and the same goes for men. Valuation is the consequence of subjective perception and mutual comparisons, which is shown in the fact that we value each other equally or we attribute to him/her a higher or lower value. We can hardly say that we value each other equally. **Not being equal in value** is reflected in stereotypes. Like equal treatment, being equal in value in itself does not ensure actual equality. However, it is a significant element.

**Gender equality** comprises both equal treatment and equal value, and is more than that. It refers to the acceptance of differences between men and women, and to the equal valuation of these differences and different social roles. That women and men are equal does not mean that they are the same or similar, and does not create a single-gender society. Gender equality means equal recognition, power and
participation in all fields of public and private life. It provides both women and men with equal positions in society and equal conditions to enjoy all rights. And the notion of equality particularly refers to equal opportunities for the development of personal potential free of the negative influences of social prejudice and stereotypes.

The notion of equal opportunities means that women and men have the opportunity to freely choose their education, profession, career, interests. It also refers to the opportunity to freely shape one’s own identity and choose among several different roles at the same time, which women and men play without negative influences of prejudice and stereotypes. Equal opportunities also means that women and men participate in economic, political, social and cultural life as they see fit.

Actual gender equality in all fields of life has not yet been achieved. Inequality is not only experienced by women, but also men. Gender stereotypes and prejudice contribute to the preservation of inequality; sometimes, they even reinforce it. Boys and girls are deterred from certain professions, from expressing certain emotions, doing certain type of work, assuming certain responsibilities etc. Men participate less in child rearing, household chores, care for the elderly as much; there is a negligible number of male teachers and carers; in the event of a divorce, men are entrusted with children much less frequently than women. On the other hand, there are fewer women in top positions in economic decision-making, fewer women mayors, fewer women in the field of technology, computers, mechanical engineering etc. Less participation in certain fields of life also means that one or the other gender has less social power in a certain field.

Therefore, to achieve gender equality, raising awareness on the gender stereotypes, their harmfulness and negative consequences is crucial. At the same time, obstacles to equality and equal opportunities must be eliminated. One way to create equal opportunities and achieve equality is to consciously take into account and introduce the aspect of equality in various fields of private and public life.

Where can we pay attention to the aspect of gender?

We are well aware that gender stereotypes cannot be fully and instantly eliminated. The awareness and understanding of how quickly and automatically stereotypes and prejudice sneak into everyday speech, behaviour and attitude to oneself and others may greatly contribute to that. None of us is completely devoid of gender stereotypes or prejudice. We can all ask ourselves: how do I see the role of women and men, girls and boys; where do these positions arise from; where and how did I acquire them. Perhaps we have already experienced obstacles and restrictions due to which we do not do the job we wanted as children, or have experienced inequality in another way as the consequence of the impact of stereotypes and prejudice.
Although gender equality interferes with all fields of our lives, when planning measures, policies or practice, we do not frequently think about solving the problem from the aspect of the needs of women and men. These needs are frequently the same, but not always. If we do not address all of them, we cannot say that public finances are used rationally, as part of the population is underprivileged. The local community can do a great deal, including things which do not require additional funds, to eliminate stereotypes, facilitate the achievement of work-life balance and promote active fatherhood.

As parents, expert workers in various fields or political decision-makers, we can raise the awareness of children and adults, broaden horizons, challenge false information, and provide different models, instead of having stereotypical expectations and social roles in terms of what is appropriate for girls/boys, male/female pupils, male/female adolescents, which may limit their opportunities to fully develop their potential and skills. This is the only way for all of us to contribute to overcoming gender stereotypes and prejudice. Neither boys nor girls should feel that their gender limits them as they develop their potential, interests and skills, and attain their goals. The awareness that both genders are equally important, equal, equivalent and equally treated and that they must have equal opportunities in life is crucial.

In this chapter, we point out certain examples of stereotypical ways of thinking and behaving, and comment on about their inappropriateness or harmfulness.

**Stereotypical behaviour:** Boys should play with cars, girls with dolls.

**Non-stereotypical behaviour:** Boys and girls play with toys they choose themselves.

Toys are important for a child’s development. By playing with different toys, children develop their identity, skills and potential; they learn about themselves, others, mutual relationships etc. Different toys are intended for different ages, levels of development and interests. Many toys are divided into ‘toys for boys’ and ‘toys for girls’, blue cars and pink castles. The division of toys according to gender and stimulating children to play only with ‘gender-appropriate’ toys reinforces stereotypes and conveys messages to children about socially expected roles based on gender. If we give only cars, tractors and blocks to boys, and only Barbie dolls and toy bakery products to girls, we restrict their creativity, imagination, and the development of their skills and potential. Consequently, stereotypes and gender-based social roles are also reinforced. To achieve gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men, it is important for all children, regardless of their gender, to be able to play with the toys they choose, although they might choose toys which are traditionally linked to the other gender. Their imagination might surprise us.
Stereotypical way of thinking: Pink is for girls, blue is for boys.

Non-stereotypical way of thinking: There are no ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ colours; there are only colours we like and colours we do not like.

The fashion industry does not offer parents (or children) a lot of choice regarding the colours of clothing. A girl who would like to have a green shirt will probably have to look for it in the boys’ department. A boy who would like to have a purple shirt will almost certainly not find it in the boys’ department. It all starts with blue and pink nappies, and continues with clothes, shoes and other fashion accessories for children in the same colours. In this way, children (and parents) tend to divide things into pink and blue. But more than colour, it is probably more important for parents (and children) that clothes are practical and durable. Or do you allow your child to choose clothes in colours they like? So, what if your son chooses a pink shirt? Did you know that pink used to be the colour people used to announce the birth of a son? There was considerable debate about whether to announce the birth of a son with blue or pink. Therefore, in 1921, it was decided in the USA that the standard colour for boys would be blue and pink for girls.

Stereotypical praise: With girls, we emphasise their appearance (e.g. “You’re a very pretty girl”), while with boys, we emphasise power and intellect (e.g. “You’ve done really well”, “You’re so big and strong”).

Non-stereotypical praise: We praise the achievement. E.g. “Look at the tower of blocks you’ve made!”

Children enjoy when we give them affirmation and praise, and adults like to give that. Most of us have automatically said to a girl “you’re such a beautiful princess” or to a boy “you’ve grown so big and strong”. The purpose of such comments and compliments which are based on the appearance of women/men is good, since they are intended to boost the child’s self-confidence. On the other hand, they tell girls in a subtle way that their role is to be beautiful and passive, and boys that they must be strong and brave. It is important to use confirmation
and praise with children. But to overcome gender stereotypes, it is better to praise the child’s effort and work, results and achievements. “Well done, you’ve built such a tall tower of blocks” conveys the message to a girl that she is capable, active and creative. “Now that you’ve changed his nappy and fed him, your teddy bear must be very satisfied,” conveys the message to a boy that he is attentive, meticulous and kind.

**Stereotypes in fairy tales and cartoons:** Princesses wait for a prince to save them. Knights are fearless and brave and are never afraid of anything.

**Being aware of stereotypes:** We talk to children about stereotypes in fairy tales.

Fairy tales stimulate children’s imagination and convey messages to them about important values, norms, relationships etc. But certain fairy tales, stories and cartoons contain many overt and covert stereotypes and expectations about the social roles of women and men. Have you noticed that female characters take care of the household and children? Or that girls are presented as passive and boys as heroes? Boys are rarely described as attentive, emotional or vulnerable, and girls are rarely described as strong heroines. Expectations about social roles are also reflected through animal characters, e.g. mother bear is cooking and cleaning the den, while father bear and son bear are collecting brushwood for the evening fire. This does not mean that such fairy tales should be discarded or not read to children. We can use them as the starting point to talk to children about stereotypes, expectations, inequality etc.

Snow White, for example, is a great starting point for a conversation about the division of work in the family, Cinderella can be a great starting point for a conversation about the type of partner the child would like to have when they grow up, and The Ugly Duckling can be a great starting point for a conversation about rising above the average etc. The same is true of numerous cartoons—Frozen can be a great starting point for a conversation about what is important when choosing a partner; The Lion King can be a great starting point for a conversation about power and paternal feelings; Brave can be a great starting point for a conversation about fathers and daughters, and the upbringing of strong daughters; Despicable Me can be a great starting point for a conversation about adoption, single-parent families etc. Conversations about such issues and topics may make children realise both girls and boys can do any work, and that bravery, heroism, attentiveness and emotionality are not characteristics limited to only one gender.
Stereotypical way of thinking: Girls must know how to cook; boys must know how to repair bikes.

Non-stereotypical way of thinking: Every person should dedicate more time to things they enjoy.

If work is strictly divided into ‘female’ and ‘male’, we may quickly overlook that a child (or an adult) may want to step out of the box and do something that is not characteristic of their gender. Girls and boys are frequently not encouraged to be artistically creative, read, put toys away, research etc. to the same extent. Such differentiation between girls and boys may also limit the choice of sports or other extracurricular activities. A boy will not decide to take ballet classes, as he ‘knows’ that dancing is for girls, while a girl might not want to reveal that she really wants to practice football. If children have the opportunity to choose their own extracurricular activities, they will enjoy them more and develop their actual potential, or learn something new, which they would otherwise not have learnt. By enabling children to test themselves in non-stereotypical activities, sports and social roles, we convey the message that we recognise and respect their interests and desires. In this way, we overcome gender stereotypes and create equal opportunities for all.

Do you know that girls have been able to enrol in the Police Academy only since the 1997/98 school year? Today, a quarter of employees of the Slovenian Police are women. The first women graduated in defence studies in 1983, and since the abolition of compulsory military service in 2004, more women have decided to pursue a military career. There are fewer than ten male midwives. The first of them graduated in 2001.

Stereotypical ways of thinking: Boys do not cry; girls do not get angry.

Non-stereotypical way of thinking: We should all be allowed to express all our emotions. There are no gender-inappropriate emotions.
The belief that boys must not cry and girls must not get angry may result in children learning early that emotions are not something we all have, but that only certain emotions are acceptable for a certain gender. Consequently, children may hide or not express certain emotions, perhaps even not experience certain emotions any more, and thus learn to deny an important part of themselves. Therefore, later in life, women more frequently express unhappiness when they actually feel angry, while men express shame and unhappiness with violence. In the long term, denying one’s own emotions may lead to harmful states – e.g. depression is more socially acceptable for women, and alcoholism for men.

If we all express our actual emotions, we express our own identity. If we do this, we are not reinforcing or promoting socially acceptable, but perhaps, fake identity.

**Stereotypical expectation:** A woman must always put others first. It is in her nature.

**Non-stereotypical expectation:** If duties are divided fairly, we all have more time.

Traditional parenting encourages girls more than boys to care for others, and communicates that the needs of others are more important than girls’ own or that their needs are not important at all. This results in the fact that women more frequently enter care-related professions, as it is self-evident for them that they are more responsible for doing household chores, and they think that their careers are less important than their partner’s etc.

If we encourage children, regardless of their gender, to express their interests, desires and needs, we create an environment in which more men will perhaps express the desire to fully use paternity and parental leave, to take leave to care for sick children etc. An environment in which duties are more evenly distributed also provides more support for women to develop their careers.
**Stereotypical way of thinking:** Ballet is for girls; football is for boys.

**Non-stereotypical way of thinking:** We choose our jobs and hobbies according to our interests.

When I grow up, I will be a/an ...” Children like talking about what they will do when they grow up. Most girls say that they want to become preschool or school teachers, while boys want to be firefighters and mechanics. There is nothing wrong with that. But it is important that children are not limited by the notion that certain professions ‘are not for their gender’. It is important for children to know that girls can be firefighters, managers, scientists, and boys can be teachers, dancers, carers in nursing homes etc.

Certain countries engage in various activities to show children that they may choose any kind of work not only the work they believe is appropriate for their gender. They organise special days when girls spend a day with their fathers at work and boys spend a day with their mothers at work, when famous people who have jobs that are not typical for their gender visit schools or kindergartens and present their work to children and young people (e.g. a female scientist carries out physical experiments together with children, a female IT specialist teaches children programming basics, a social care provider tells children that also boys/men can do care-related work). This gives children opportunities to learn that jobs, interests and sports are not appropriate only for a certain gender.

**Stereotypical behaviour:** Ridiculing a boy with long hair.

**Non-stereotypical way of thinking:** Girls, boys, women and men choose their own hair length.

Adults may set a positive example from which children can learn; we can create schools’ and kindergartens’ spaces where difference is respected. Children may be encouraged not to ridicule unconventional thinking, as ridicule may result in discrimination. When we see that a child is ridiculed because they stand out with their behaviour, clothes or extracurricular activity, e.g. a boy with long
Teaching materials and the content of various school subjects teach children and young people about social roles, expectations, norms and values. The so-called hidden curriculum contains many stereotypes about women and men. These are shown in various ways, from the way in which women and men and relationships between them are presented, which characteristics are attributed to women and which to men, in which activities and chores men are and women are presented. The visibility and treatment of women and men also differs. History books contain many examples of contributions made by important men, while the contributions of important women are rarely or briefly presented. The reason for this is not that women have not contributed significantly to history, but because throughout history, women’s contributions were less visible, frequently overlooked and so quickly forgotten. Also, since power (titles, assets) was usually inherited on the male side, women frequently did not have the opportunity to prove themselves as sovereigns. Selecting literature (e.g. for book reports and reading badges) so that female and male authors are equally represented contributes to the equal representation and visibility of women and men.

It is completely normal for boys to play with boys and girls with girls. A problem arises when a child would like to be in a group of the opposite sex, but they should not be. An excessive and pronounced grouping of children, such as in various activities at kindergartens and schools into a ‘group of boys’ and a ‘group of girls’ promotes the belief that it is only gender that matters, but not all other human characteristics. The formation of mixed groups (at kindergartens and schools) teach children at an early age to cooperate and learn about each other as a valuable individual, and gender plays no significant role. The division into groups of boys and girls may also encourage
competitiveness, as children like to compete with each other and compare themselves with each other; boys want to prove that they are better than girls and vice versa. In this way, gender stereotypes are reinforced. Gender stereotypes are also reinforced if a whole group of boys is punished because one of them disobeyed in class. Or if all girls are praised because a few of them did more than expected for homework. The fact that a child is well-behaved, naughty, smart, obedient, disobedient, chatty, concentrated etc. is not related to gender. The implication that ‘boys are naughty’ and ‘girls are well-behaved’ is a reflection of gender stereotypes and social expectations.

**Stereotypical view of violence:** Boys will be boys.  
**Non-stereotypical view of violence:** Violence is violence, regardless of who commits it.

When boys fight, violence is most frequently justified by saying “boys will be boys”. If girls fight, it is perceived very differently and frowned upon. Such stereotypes cannot and must not justify violence. Violence is violence and is not acceptable, regardless of who commits it – boys, girls, men, women. The reasons why men are violent to women also arise from the stereotypical view of the subordinate role and position of women, e.g. a husband tells his wife what to do, controls her, tells her who to socialise with, makes decisions on all expenses etc.
Stereotypical belief: Young children should be cared for by their mother above all.

Non-stereotypical belief: Both parents should care for young children.

In this day and age, to be an active father is rather different than it used to be half a century ago or more. Important steps to promote active fatherhood were taken at the legislative level with the possibility to share parental leave (in 1976), and then with the introduction of non-transferable paternity leave (in 2003). If the generations of our grandfathers and fathers had waited for their children to be born in front of maternity hospitals, the presence of the father when a child is born is today almost taken for granted. Most fathers decide to use their paternity leave, but many future parents still behave in a rather stereotypical way when it comes to the ways parental leave may be used. When they are not based on the economic calculation of household income, decisions generally comply with the stereotypical belief that young children should be cared for, first and foremost, by their mother. It is often feared the father will not be able to care for the child as well as the mother. But we tend to forget that women are not born for the parental role; they have to learn how to do it. On the other hand, the numerous advantages of active fatherhood have been demonstrated, from the equally important role of both parents in child rearing to the positive influence of active fatherhood from the first moment a child is born on care and the division of responsibilities in the future, on the socialisation of children, and on the opportunity for children to establish a relationship with both parents equally.

Stereotypical belief: After divorce, children should stay with the mother.

Non-stereotypical belief: After divorce, both parents should care for their children.

Parents must provide so-called parental care, which means that parents must care for the life and health of their children, protect them, care for them, raise them and supervise them, enable them to grow up to be healthy, have a harmonious personal development and be able to live and work independently, support them, and care for the schooling and education of their children according to their skills, likes and preferences. These are tasks for mothers and fathers, so it would be right for both to contribute an equal share to the welfare and development of their children, even after divorce or the termination of cohabitation. Decision making on access should take into account who has cared more for the child, to whom the child is more emotionally attached etc. Giving children to a certain parent must not be based on stereotypes, as they harm everyone involved, mothers and fathers, but particularly children.
Too much work by one of the partners (usually women) on care and housework may lead to conflicts between partners, burnout, fewer career options etc. The fact that most housework is done by women is not only the result of social expectations, but also due to women themselves. As shown in research carried out in 2012, women say more frequently than men that they prefer to clean the flat and iron clothes themselves because they do it better. The reasons for this have several layers, from the fact that through socialisation, women internalise the social expectation that these chores are, first and foremost, their responsibility, to the fact that they could perceive themselves as bad partners if they leave these chores to their partner and that perhaps women actually do these chores more quickly because they have more practice. In this way, we can swiftly find ourselves in a vicious circle; the way out of such a situation is a fair division of everyday housework between men, women and also children according to their age and abilities. At the end of the day, cooperation is one of the foundations of family life, isn’t it?

According to research carried out in 2012, mothers supervise children’s homework work more than fathers, and the same is true for administrative matters for children, childcare organisation, the organisation of paid assistance for the elderly, shopping for the family and household etc. In most families with a child with special needs, it is women who give up their job or career;
Stereotypical way of thinking: Changing baby’s nappies is the responsibility of mothers.

Non-stereotypical way of thinking: Both parents change baby’s nappies.

M any mothers change their first nappy in the maternity hospital, where the technique is shown to them by hospital staff. Fathers can learn how to do this in the same way as mothers; a community nurse who visits the family soon after their return from hospital will be happy to show the father how to change a nappy, and how to bathe and care for the child. It makes sense that visits from a community nurse take place when both parents are home; they can quickly resolve all dilemmas, fears and questions regarding care for the new baby. Don’t mind if a stereotype about the perception of the role of a mother as the only true carer of the child and the father as the ‘helper’ appears during such a conversation. Openly stating stereotypical beliefs gives us the opportunity to talk about them: are they based on substantiated facts or are they, as with all stereotypes, merely ‘facts’ which restrict and are unfair? It is not fair to claim that fathers cannot take care of their children or that they do not take care of their children well enough. Of course, there are some fathers like that. But there are also mothers like that. Men can care for babies just as well. They cannot breastfeed them, but they can bottle-feed them, wash them, change their nappies, cut their nails etc. Perhaps some men are a little clumsy at first (but so are some mothers), but when women correct or supervise them, it deters them rather than encouraging them to be more actively involved in childcare from the outset. By encouraging men to care for babies, we strengthen women’s faith in the ability of men to care for children.

also, most foster care is done by women etc. In all these fields, gender equality has not yet been achieved either in terms of balanced representation or in terms of equal recognition of women and men. Children also learn by observation, and transfer this experience into their partner and family relationships. We probably all wish our daughters not to be overwhelmed with housework and care to the extent that it hampers the realisation of all their potential. We equally wish that our sons have a loving and candid relationship with their children, and live in communities where they can realise their potential. Is this reflected in the everyday life of their childhood?
**Stereotypical behaviour:** When children are being discussed, only mothers are addressed.

**Non-stereotypic behaviour:** When children are being discussed, both parents are addressed.

Although it is usually mothers who take their children to health-care centres, more frequently attend school parent-teacher meetings and consultations, more frequently attend to administrative matters for children etc., this does not mean that fathers should be excluded. When in shops selling technical or construction-related products, many women probably feel that the expert there is treating them as incompetents in technology and construction. Fathers may have similar feelings when information about children in institutions (e.g. health-care and social institutions, schools) are only intended for mothers.

**Stereotypical planning of policy measures:** Gender plays no role in the planning of policy measures.

**Non-stereotypical planning of policy measures:** Policy measures are planned to meet the needs of both women and men.

There is actually no policy measure where the aspect of gender may be neglected, although gender may seem not related to it at first sight. One such measure is the planning of bus routes. By checking statistical data, we may establish that women use public transport more frequently than men and that women more frequently accompany children to kindergarten or school. Therefore, such data should be taken into account in the planning of bus routes. Bus routes would run as close to kindergartens and schools as possible, and the frequency of transport would be adjusted not only to school timetable, but also to the timetable of employed parents, particularly mothers. Another aspect which should be taken into account is that public transport is also used by secondary-school students. If public transport is not adjusted to their needs, they are dependent on their parents. Parents frequently face the problem of how to harmonise their working hours with the start and end of classes. Local community can make it a lot easier for them by planning more frequent buses when classes start and end.

**Stereotypical preparation of budget:** Ostensible gender neutrality.

**Non-stereotypical preparation of budget:** The needs of women and men are taken into account.
State or local policies may address the needs of women and men most comprehensively to take into account the gender aspect when planning the budget. At the state level, the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2005–2013, was adopted, on the basis of which biannual periodical plans are adopted in which individual ministries determine key measures (and funds) to achieve gender equality. Local communities may also be active in this field; their budgets must contribute to the provision of gender equality. This does not generally mean that municipalities have separate items for women and men; it merely means that the same funds are allocated more fairly, since they address the needs of women and men. Perhaps the aspect of gender should be included in the budget in one of the fields mentioned below, where policy-makers may assist with the following issues:

- **employment**: an analysis of which sectors and activities employ women and which employ men; what are the working hours in these sectors; who commutes to another town to work and which means of transport do they use/would like to use; are public services adjusted (e.g. working hours of kindergartens, availability of care services for sick and disabled elderly people and elderly people who need assistance); does public transport consider working hours and employed people etc.; projects to enhance economic independence of rural women;

- **access to services**: which public services are provided by the municipality and which private services are co-financed by the municipality; are they adjusted to the recognised needs of women and men (e.g. working hours of kindergartens are also suitable for parents who work afternoons and evenings, holiday activities/childcare for primary school children, availability of sports activities according to gender-characteristic use, availability of special services for special population groups (e.g. older widowers who need to learn about the basics of cooking; rural women; courses in Slovenian for female immigrants from cultures in which women are expected not to enter the labour market; victims of family violence etc.);

- **availability of health-care services**: what is the care for the reproductive health of women like; are older men motivated to undergo regular medical examinations etc.;

- **family life**: what are the working hours of kindergartens; what is the situation regarding the availability of services for daily or permanent care for sick and disabled elderly people and elderly people who need assistance; the availability of playgrounds, green areas, activities for children and young people, particularly during holidays etc.;

- **public transport**: what are the needs of various population groups; who uses it most frequently in the existing form and who would use it if it were adjusted to the needs of certain target groups in terms of routes and frequency of transport (e.g. parents of young children, older women and men, families who own one car, single-parent families etc.).

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*Stereotypical way of thinking:* Children are well taken care of; we have kindergartens.

*Non-stereotypical way of thinking:* Care-related duties do not end with childcare.
Local communities provide plenty of services which make it easier to achieve a work-life balance, and make possible a higher quality of life. Numerous original tasks of local communities are from these fields. These tasks include care for spatial development, local public services, particularly in the field of social security, preschool education, protection of children and families and numerous social groups; there are also fields such as adult education, tasks for promoting non-governmental, cultural and artistic activities, recreation etc.

How can local authorities know the needs of people with care-related duties, for example? A swift, cheap and efficient way is to seek the answers to questions what the actual needs of mothers, fathers and people who care for the sick, old or disabled people from people with care-related duties. The ministry has prepared a proposal for a survey, which is available on the website of the Aktivni.Vsi project (www.enakostspolov.si, ‘About the project’ tab).

Such an analysis will most probably show that parents may encounter a problem about where to put their child after their parental leave ends if there are not enough spaces available in the kindergarten during the year and must wait to be admitted in September. From the aspect of women’s economic independence and their opportunities in the labour market, this is an especially sensitive issue, as generally women leave their jobs or do not look for a job in such cases. This may have numerous consequences, from a difficult return to the labour market to lower pension etc. The analysis will most probably also show that parents of children attending the first triad of primary school face problems about where to put their children during school holidays. Currently, grandmothers and grandfathers are frequently indispensable for solving such problems; however, we need to be aware that, due to extended prolonged working lives, future generations will not be able to count on them. Many Slovenian municipalities organise or co-finance organised holiday childcare. The latter must be adjusted to the actual needs of parents, e.g. take into account potential daily labour commuting, suitable locations of childcare etc.

Local communities in cooperation with other public institutions or private providers may develop new forms of support for parents of minors, for the elderly etc. An example of such a service is the provision of a hot meal that is delivered during school holidays. Normally, children attending the second triad of primary school are perfectly capable of being at home alone, but the provision of hot meals still presents a problem. Perhaps local communities can connect with retirement homes in such cases, which could deliver hot meals not only to the elderly but also to primary school children. Another service which parents of young children might need is occasional childcare at home. In major towns with many students, this is generally not a problem. But it is a problem in small towns where less student work is required or there is no single point of organisation to provide home childcare services by verified childminders. As mentioned above, care-related duties do not end with children. More and more employed people also care for elderly parents and relatives or parents and relatives who need assistance. Local communities provide numerous services in this field, but needs for new forms of assistance have emerged. In many local communities, public transport is poor, and taxi services are not provided everywhere or are not affordable. This makes elderly residents and residents who need assistance dependent on relatives, neighbours and friends. In this regard, local communities can think of ways to make the journey to health-care centres, pharmacies, shops etc. easier for residents without their own transport options. With a knack for organisation, a volunteer network can also be established. Probably we all desire to remain in our local environment for as long as possible. If local communities can ensure the provision of hot meals and care assistance, this would be most welcome and needed. Also welcome would be a cleaning service with verified cleaners with basic knowledge of work with the elderly.
Slovenia is a country which ranks high on global and EU index charts regarding gender equality. Gender equality is so important that it was included in the Constitution. Occasionally, this seems enough. However, we have not yet achieved gender equality in practice: e.g. women, despite having higher average education, do not occupy managerial or leading positions, or participate in the labour market, on an equal footing with men; due to family duties, they work more frequently part-time and their career opportunities are poorer; women prevail in education, care-related work, while men prevail in technology, computing, information technology, mechanical engineering; the share of women in politics at the national and local level has not yet reached 40 per cent (the lower threshold when we can speak of balanced representation); women are more frequently exposed to family violence, the risk of poverty etc. The key reason for all this is gender stereotyping; therefore, it is important to be aware of gender stereotypes and to eliminate them. Workshops and seminars for professionals on this topic are most welcome. The issue of the elimination or reduction of gender stereotypes is complex – stereotypes can also be encountered where we do not expect them. For example, we could ask ourselves: are scientific awards mainly received by men; is it the same in the case of municipal awards; do women receive awards only in the field of social security, culture, education, and men in the field of sports, business etc.; are invitations for nominations written in a way which addresses women and men; what are the names of streets in our town; how many streets are named after women and men, respectively; are streets named after women relegated to the outskirts of towns etc. As we have already emphasised, one of the obstacles to combating stereotypes effectively is the fact that they are part of our culture and activities, that they are frequently perceived as facts and as having ‘always existed’. All change takes time. It is said that work in this field is a marathon, as results do not come instantly. But every run begins with a step.
Employers, employees and unions are important links in a comprehensive approach to eliminating stereotypes, particularly stereotypes regarding work-life balance and active fatherhood. Slovenia is one of those states with the best organisation of parental leave (regarding type, duration and financial benefits); however, also in this respect, a gap between legal options and practice is evident. Many employers are active when it comes to work-life balance, and many have acquired the Family-Friendly Company Certificate. Within this advisory procedure, organisations adopt and take measures which make achieving a work-life balance for their employees easier. Measures may concern working hours (time of arrival/departure, additional leave for the first day of school, organisation of replacements and stand-by duty, the planning of annual leave, flexible breaks, child-related time bonus), work organisation (replacement systems, business trips, team-work organisation), jobs (remote work/work from home), information and communication policy (communication with employees and the public, surveys among employees on work-life balance), management skills (the training of managers in work-life balance, the enhancement of social skills of management, the assessment of managers), human resource development (reintegration following a lengthy absence, individual career development plans, corporative volunteering), structure of payment and rewarded achievements (gifts for new-born children, leisure-time activities, scholarships for employees’ children, psychological counselling and assistance) or services for families (day care, holiday childcare, an opportunity for employees to bring their children to the organisation).

But there are fewer employers who are aware that their female and male workers have care-related duties. Research shows that men still face obstacles when they wish to take parental leave or leave to care for a sick child. Certain employers promote active fatherhood; some have measures in place in this regard, e.g. certain measures from the “adjustable package of measures of Fathers and Employers in Action‘ (the Ukrepi za usklajevanje plačanega dela in družine (Work-Life Balance Measures) manual): encouraging men to take paternity leave, and encouraging men and women to divide parental leave and leave to care for sick relatives; counselling for fathers about work-life balance; informal meetings of fathers, such as a breakfast a few times a year to exchange experience, point out problems they meet when trying to
achieve work-life balance; the introduction of a mailbox where employees can submit proposals anonymously; an open days for learning about the father’s job; encouraging employees to leave work after eight hours; paid absence to accompany a pregnant partner to medical examinations etc.

Which laws contain more information on the aforementioned topics?

› The Protection Against Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of any personal circumstance, including gender.
› The Equal Opportunities for Woman and Men Act stipulates common ground to improve the position of women, and create equal opportunities for women and men.
› The Employment Relationship Act stipulates obligations and rights regarding work-life balance, equal treatment of both genders, special protection of parenthood etc.
› The Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act regulates all types of parental leave and benefits.
› The Family Code regulates marriage, cohabitation, relationships between parents and children, forms of state aid in cases of problems with partners and in family life, measures to protect the child’s best interests, and subsistence, adoption, foster care, care of children etc.
› The Domestic Violence Prevention Act prohibits physical, sexual, psychological or economic family violence, and stipulates measures to protect victims of family violence.
› The Organization and Financing of Education Act stipulates that an objective of education is to provide for the optimal development of individuals, regardless of their gender or other personal circumstances, and education for mutual tolerance, the awareness of gender equality, respect for difference, cooperation with others, respect for children’s and human rights and fundamental freedoms, the development of equal opportunities for both genders etc.
Sources and additional information

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