The Danish gender equality paradox in leadership roles

INSIGHTS ON THE ROOT CAUSES AND LEVERS TO BUILD MORE BALANCED LEADERSHIP

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ABOVE & BEYOND

PRESENTS

THE DIVERSITY COUNCIL®

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About the research

This research has been conducted and the report written in the period February to May 2022 in a joint collaborative effort led by The Diversity Council and involving numerous Danish companies and public organisations. This report aims to contribute to a better understanding of the current state of gender equality in managerial and executive jobs in Denmark and possible levers to accelerate women's careers in leadership roles.

About The Diversity Council

The Diversity Council is a strategic corporate alliance and a unique international diversity accelerator with bold ambitions. The Diversity Council was founded by Above & Beyond Group in Denmark, and its key objectives are to address barriers to equality, strengthen the female talent pipeline and create more diverse and inclusive workplaces. The Diversity Council brings together all levels of the partner companies to empower cultural transformation, with engagement from top management, HR Heads and employees. The current members of The Diversity Council are: AP Pension, Danmarks Nationalbank, Coloplast, Dansk Erhverv, Gorrissen Federspiel, Headspring Executive Development, ISS, KPMG, Maersk, Maersk Drilling, Maersk Tankers, McKinsey & Company, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, NKT, PensionDanmark, PwC, Rambøll, SAP, Tryg, Vestas and Board Network.

About The Report

The report departs from establishing an apparent paradox where women are significantly underrepresented in managerial and executive roles, despite Denmark being a frontrunner in having equal opportunities across genders and having led the way forward towards a more gender-equal society across numerous dimensions such as universal healthcare, access to education, voting rights and freedom of speech.

To understand this paradox, we research the problem from several lenses in a unified framework. First, we establish four critical steps over the career lifecycle – inspire, attract, promote and retain. We then investigate i) macro-level factors across Nordic and other European countries leading to the gender equality paradox in leadership roles, such as cross-country differences in policies, historical background and societal norms and ii) micro-level drivers within organisations throughout critical steps of their career journeys.

The report leverages multiple sources of insight to bring a novel perspective on the issue in a Danish context. Firstly, we employed national statistics across countries to offer evidence on drivers of cross-country differences in gender parity across dimensions. Secondly, we leveraged detailed microdata on all higher education graduates in Denmark, from 2008 to 2012 and followed their careers over time. Thirdly, we employ a proprietary survey on career choices, launched across more than 10 large organisations in Denmark, providing more than 4,500 responses. In addition, the report puts forward concrete considerations that could help narrow the gender imbalance in leadership roles at multiple stages of the career funnel. Fourthly, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with women and men employed across various roles and seniority levels from different partnering organisations to understand their career journeys.

Delimitations of the report

The report leverages multiple sources of information and analytical and qualitative tools to derive the conclusions and insights shared. Given the complexity of the topic and multiple possible confounding factors, established patterns and relationships should not be interpreted as causal as this is beyond the scope of this report. In addition, the established considerations and potential initiatives are based on case examples, academic research articles, corporate reports and field experiments. The considerations and initiatives have been prioritised among the many possible initiatives given the identified obstacles and challenges with gender equality in Denmark. The outlined considerations have different implementation timelines and time-to-impact, hence the prioritisation of initiatives is highly dependent on the time horizon to achieve gender parity in leadership roles.
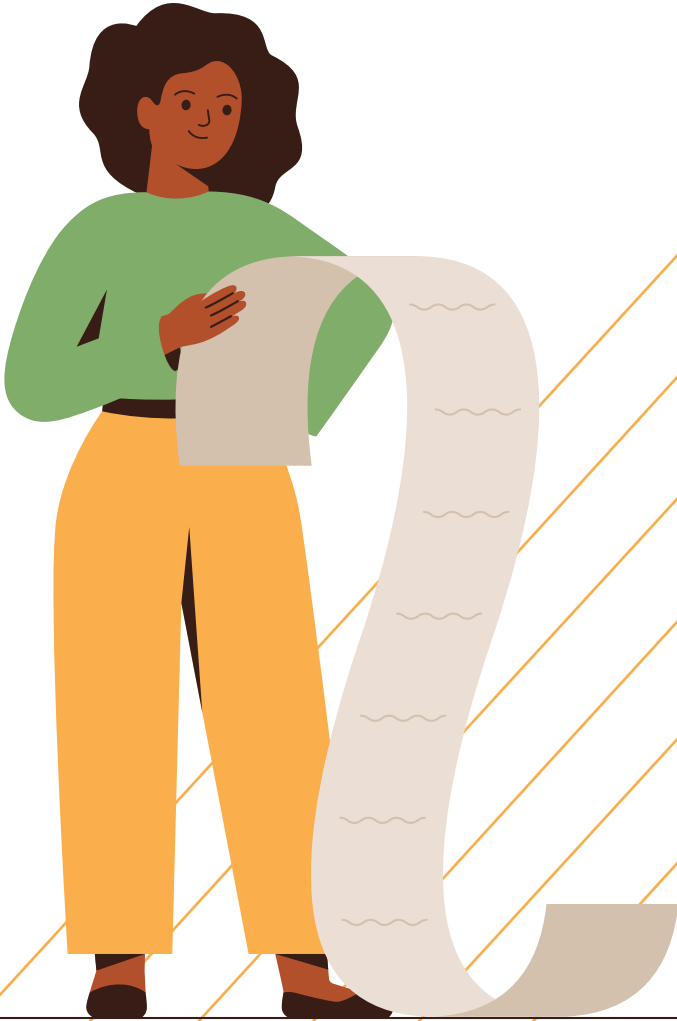
Executive summary

Nordic countries are frontrunners across many gender equality indicators, however, there are substantial differences in the representation of women in leadership roles

The Nordic countries are known as frontrunners and strong advocates for gender equality and women's rights in society. Historically, they were among the first countries to advance further steps toward equality between genders such as voting rights and access to education and the labour force.

Compared to other European countries, the Nordics score on average higher in terms of some of the fundamental equality indicators mentioned above. Despite the above-average performance in many aspects of gender equality in society, there are significant differences in the perception of achieved gender equality in leadership positions. In Denmark, 58 per cent of the population believes that gender equality has been achieved in leadership roles, whereas in Sweden only 38 per cent believe so. However, looking at the actual share of women in leadership roles, Sweden ranks the highest among the Nordic countries and Denmark ranks last (43 per cent versus 29 per cent). This gap between Denmark and the rest of the Nordic countries has existed for several decades and has been widening over time. In 2001, the gap between Sweden and Denmark was 9 percentage points, whereas in 2021 it was 14 percentage points. The implication of this evolution is that the pipeline of women in leadership roles in Denmark today is thinner compared to other Nordic countries.

One explanation is that because of the perceived equality in leadership roles in Denmark, improving gender equality at the top has not been a strong enough societal focus. Despite having the largest share of women in management, Sweden is also the country where society has a more reserved and critical view of the achieved gender equality in leadership.

The Nordic countries are highly similar in terms of labour force participation, gender wage gap, financial inclusion and access to education across genders.

However, the outcomes in terms of the share of women in management are vastly different with Denmark having the lowest share of women leaders in the Nordics at 29 per cent. This is the Danish gender equality paradox. This report offers a data-driven perspective on the root causes behind the paradox and potential considerations to build more gender-balanced leadership in Denmark.

Understanding the root causes behind gender inequality in leadership roles requires a holistic analysis of the career lifecycle

Our approach analyses the gender paradox from a career lifecycle point of view. The approach identifies critical steps in the career journey, where significant leakage of women talent is observed: 1) 'Inspire', 2) 'Attract', 3) 'Promote' and 4) 'Retain'. The steps are not discrete moments in time, but rather phases in one's career that at times overlap or intersect. The report analyses each of them individually and seeks to:

- Shed light and inform the public debate on this highly important topic for both society and the business communities
- Provide a fact-based view on the key drivers behind the gender paradox and obstacles leading to a low representation of women at the top of the career ladder in Denmark
- Offer a range of considerations to help narrow the gender gap across the critical steps over the career lifecycle of women

The report leverages multiple sources of data to offer a holistic perspective on the factors, including:

- National registry data on more than 30,000 graduates and public country-level statistics
- A proprietary survey conducted among approximately 4,500 employees in Denmark
- More than 15 qualitative interviews with employees

Gender imbalances manifest themselves already at the educational stage, where the top leadership-producing degrees are dominated by men even though more women graduate overall

Starting with the step 'Inspire', we look into the educational choices that men and women make before joining the labour force by following the career evolution of a cohort of all master's degrees graduates from 2008 and 2009. Firstly, we find more women graduating with a master's degree than men (women represent 56 per cent of all master's graduates in 2021) and that the number of women graduates has more than doubled over the last 15 years. However, there are significant gender imbalances across degrees. For example, the degrees that produce the most managers and executives[1] are dominated by men graduates. The gender split within the top leadership-producing degrees is approximately 45 per cent women and 55 per cent men. Therefore, women appear to be relatively underrepresented in the degrees that are most conducive to leadership careers.

Secondly, we find that men tend to self-select more into the private sector compared to women. This suggests that the gender imbalance is even more pronounced in the private sector from the very beginning of the career lifecycle. While the educational background and sectoral employment preferences play a role in the gender gap, they are not primary drivers since one would then have expected that throughout the career ladder, women leaders would be between 45 and 56 per cent (the educational gender split before entering the labour force). However, the evidence shows that women with the top leadership-producing degrees represent only 29 per cent of managers and 19 per cent of executives. Hence, events and circumstances across the remaining critical moments – 'Attract', 'Promote' and 'Retain' appear to play a bigger role in explaining the low representation of women in leadership roles.

Finally, we find that the share of women graduates with top leadership-producing degrees is increasing. However, this growing trend is not enough to close the gender gap alone.

Men and women are equally ambitious to become leaders, however, women face greater challenges on their way to climbing the career ladder due to established gender norms in society, a higher degree of household-related work and caregiving responsibilities and less career support

The report finds that men and women are interested in becoming leaders or executives to the same extent, however gender-specific norms shape differences in the motivation and discouragement of taking on leadership roles. Women appear to be more discouraged about managerial roles due to a perception of too pronounced office politics[2] and challenges in combining family responsibilities with increased job demands compared to men. A representative Nordic survey also shows that Denmark appears to have relatively more traditional gender norms, where women are more often perceived as the preferred primary caretaker, compared to its Nordic peers with Sweden being the most progressive.

Our survey results show that today women are significantly more likely to be the main ones responsible for household-related work and the primary caregivers (43 per cent of women non-managers versus 24 per cent of men) and these differences remain along the career ladder. This means that women are challenged to maintain the same degree of availability and flexibility at work since being a manager or executive requires significant time commitment and experience.

The report also identifies significant differences in parental leave policies across the Nordic countries, seen as one of the main drivers behind the gender paradox. Until a recent reform in Denmark in 2021, fathers only had two weeks of earmarked parental leave[3] according to national policy, compared to 14 and 15 weeks in Sweden and Norway, respectively. Therefore, national policies in Denmark have historically implicitly reinforced a more traditional gender split in caregiving roles as mothers had allocated most of the available parental leave to them. Other Nordic countries have pursued a more gender-balanced split in parental leave policies and the recent policy change in Denmark moves in the same direction as the other Nordic countries.

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1   Business administration, Economics, Management, Technical sciences, Humanities and Science
2   Involves the use of power and social networking within the organisation to achieve changes.
3   With the recent reform from 2021, fathers in Denmark will receive 11 weeks of earmarked parental, starting from 2022.

The policy change is therefore seen as an important step towards levelling the playing field across genders.

In addition, women also receive career advancement support on the way to the top, to a lesser extent than men (via mentorship and sponsorship). Women are 30 per cent less likely to be encouraged to take on a high-profile project, ask for a promotion or be recommended for a project. They are also 10 per cent less likely to receive career-related guidance or be connected to senior leaders to advise on their career development. In addition, the survey findings reveal that women are interacting informally with senior leaders less frequently than men and that they are two times more likely to never interact with senior leaders. These findings suggest that women generally have weaker networks in the workplace.

Altogether, these barriers are reflected in the gender split along the career ladder. Based on the cohort analysis of graduates from 2008/2009 with top leadership-producing degrees, 29 and 19 per cent of those who became managers and executives, respectively, were women.

Women face differential treatment on their way to the top and organisations are not inclusive enough

Retaining top talent in an organisation requires an inclusive culture and an environment where employees can thrive and bring their best to work, without feeling concerned that they can face differential treatment.

The survey results offer a glimpse into the experiences that men and women have at the workplace in Denmark. Women managers and executives are significantly more likely to face microaggressions in the form of having to justify their expertise or having it questioned more than others, being interrupted or spoken over and receiving comments on their emotional state such as "you're too angry, feisty and/ or emotional". Between 40-50 per cent of women have experienced this at the workplace, compared to only 15-30 per cent of men. The frequency of microaggressions intensifies along the career ladder.

Similarly, we find that both men and women 'onlys' – i.e., colleagues who are the only representatives of their gender within a team or group, are also more

likely to experience differential treatment and microaggressions. These findings imply that women face 'invisible' obstacles and negative experiences at the workplace more often than men and being a women manager or top executive requires a higher degree of resilience and courage.

Promoting and retaining women in leadership roles throughout their career journeys requires a consistent, fair and objective design of the career ladder for all genders. The survey shows that career advancement is perceived as less fair and objective by women compared to men. At the managerial level, 55 per cent of men agree that the system is fair compared to only 44 per cent of women. At the executive level, the relative differences are bigger: 71 per cent of men and 50 per cent of women believe that the system is fair. This implies that women who have succeeded in climbing the top have experienced the promotion systems and the route to a leadership career as less fair and objective. This underlines the importance for organisations to consider career advancement processes that are transparent and inclusive regardless of gender.

Organisations are not sufficiently recognizing and formalizing actions to promote gender equality

While organisations have made progress in raising awareness of the importance of gender diversity in the workplace, employees perceive that relatively few concrete actions have been taken in making this a strategic priority.

The survey results report that more than 50 per cent of managers do not know or believe DE&I efforts are not formally recognised in their organisation[4]. This suggests that incentives to promote gender diversity are often not tied to performance management schemes. Employees (45 per cent of non-managers and 63 per cent of leaders) report that senior leaders have spoken about the importance of diversity, however, only between 10-20 per cent of non-managers believe that concrete actions and structures are in place in the form of training, investing resources to promote DE&I, goal setting and holding leaders accountable.

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4   Excluding those employees who reported that they do not have any DE&I responsibilities and also do not spend time on it.

Several practical considerations can address each of the drivers behind the low representation of women in leadership roles to narrow the gender gap

Both private and public institutions can take several actions to tackle each of the barriers that women face when climbing the career ladder and narrow the gender imbalances at every seniority level.

1 – Inspire the next generation through celebration of women role models and talent development programmes at the early education stage
The gender imbalances occur already when graduates choose which degrees to pursue. Even though the share of women graduates is increasing among the most leadership-generating degrees, significant road to parity is still ahead in STEM-related degrees. Therefore, both public and private institutions can launch promotional campaigns for STEM-related fields, problem-solving events, and competitions to attract girls from an early age. Furthermore, celebrating successful women at the top, raising awareness of their journeys and role modelling can be effective tools in countering gender-stereotypical beliefs about women. These actions can encourage and fuel the motivation of the younger generation of women to pursue leadership careers as they would be able to see themselves in the successful women who have reached the top of the career ladder.

2 – Promote a family-friendly workplace culture and challenge established gender roles in daily life by supporting a balanced split of household duties and caregiving responsibilities
Women's higher share of household work and caregiving responsibilities makes them relatively less flexible and available in terms of working hours compared to men. Companies can help level out the playing field for men and women by establishing family-friendly work policies and supporting parents to manage household and caregiving responsibilities. Examples include allowances for outsourcing household-related work, paid entitlements for children's sickness and flexible working arrangements. In addition, companies can equalise parental leave policies between men and women to incentivise a more equal split of parental leave between mothers and fathers.

3 – Support talent on the way to the top through mentorship, sponsorship, leadership programmes and functional capability development
Accelerating the career paths of women requires active involvement and engagement of senior leadership in organisations. Women are still less likely to receive career advancement support than their men peers. Therefore, organisations should establish mentorship and sponsorship programmes specifically targeting top talent. Senior leaders should focus on concrete actions to accelerate women's career paths such as recommending mentees for promotions and projects but also actively creating opportunities for them. In addition, companies can further support the transition of women into managerial career paths by providing functional capability training (as a supplement to educational background), leadership training and preparation, but also managerial coaching for those already in managerial roles.

4 – Promote an inclusive workplace culture and design objective, transparent and fair promotion processes
Changing workplace culture and practices to better retain women talent relies on improving the day-to-day experiences at the workplace but also increasing the transparency and fairness of career advancement. We propose several actions that are conducive to fostering an inclusive workplace culture, centred around investing in educational sessions on biases, encouraging positive reinforcing behaviours, continuously monitoring progress and enforcing accountability. Fostering an inclusive workplace culture requires involving and empowering

employees at all levels in the organisation. Companies should focus on designing fair and objective advancement criteria and processes, ensure consistency in the execution of those processes and clearly communicate the criteria for reaching leadership roles to improve the perceived fairness of advancement.

5 – Visibly commit to DE&I goals, establish accountability for meeting goals with leaders and formally recognize employees' DE&I efforts
Successfully improving DE&I requires commitment and accountability at the top. Companies should define clear goals and targets and continuously measure and report progress on those (e.g., diverse candidate slates) considering the starting point in gender equality and the industry context. Goals and targets need to be assigned to a specific person or group to ensure accountability for reaching those goals. In addition, organisations should reward and incentivise prioritisation of efforts leading to improvement of DE&I by linking concrete outcomes to performance reviews and bonus pay-outs.

In conclusion, we hope that this report will:
i. contribute to a better understanding of the key drivers behind the low representation of women in leadership roles in Denmark based on the novel findings

ii. inspire organisations to take further actions in building a more balanced gender split across all layers based on the proposed considerations.

1. The starting point for gender equality in Denmark and the Danish gender equality paradox

The Nordic countries have a heritage in being frontrunners in promoting gender equality in society

Denmark and its Nordic neighbouring countries have a long history of promoting gender equality in society, particularly through structural regulatory measures. This has placed the Nordics as a frontrunner region on gender equality in many dimensions. As shown in Exhibit 1, Denmark became the first country to introduce compulsory education for both sexes in 1814, Norway enacted the world's first parental leave law in 1892, Finland became the first country in Europe to grant women the right to vote and stand for election in 1906, and Sweden passed the first law in the world on paid maternity leave in 1955.

The Nordic countries were also among the earliest to legislate on daycare provision, introduce paternity leave, as well as to pass laws prohibiting the termination of employment on the grounds of marriage or parenthood (Melby, Ravn and Carlsson Wetterberg 2008; Hilson 2007; Valdimarsdóttir 2006; Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner 2008). Ambitions for gender equality have long been expressed explicitly by these countries, and this commitment forms an important part of the countries' self-image.

In the last few decades, these countries have continued to pursue gender equality in society through various policies and initiatives. In the past, Norway set gender quotas in 2003 for boards of publicly traded companies, and Denmark set requirements for companies to set targets, design policies and report on progress on promoting gender balance in 2012. Sweden increased the earmarked portion of parental leave to 90 days for each parent in 2016, and Iceland has required companies to demonstrate that they pay equal wages to men and women since 2018. In addition, in 2000 Iceland was the first country to introduce a fully equalised parental leave sharing scheme, three months for the mother, three months for the father and 3 months to be shared by both parents.

Gender equality paradox: Denmark is performing among the top countries across multiple gender equality indicators but is lagging significantly behind Nordic peers on the share of women in management positions

Currently, Denmark performs well across various measures of gender equality, such as labour force participation, financial inclusion, educational attainment, size of wage gap and generally has similar scores to Nordic peers. Exhibit 2 illustrates Denmark's effort in establishing a society where both men and women have equal freedom of choice with a few indicators underlying the egalitarian nature of society:

- Women in Denmark have **higher labour force participation** rates than in most other European countries.
- Denmark has a relatively low gender wage gap based on median earnings compared to other countries.
- Denmark has a **higher rate of women in parliament** relative to men than most countries.
- Denmark has a **higher representation of women in higher education** than men.
- Denmark is **one of the top performers in the Women, Business and the Law index**, which measures the legal rights of women across eight indicators (mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets and pension).

Despite having achieved a high degree of gender equality across many dimensions in society, Denmark has been performing worse compared to Nordic peers and most European countries on women in managerial and executive positions. This is at the core of the Danish gender equality paradox, as it appears contradictory that Denmark scores

similarly well as its Scandinavian peers on gender equality on multiple dimensions, but at the same time trails behind on the representation of women at the top of the career ladder. Nordic countries range from 0.74 for Sweden (the best among these four countries) to Norway at 0.53. Meanwhile, Denmark's ratio is 0.45.[5] This places Denmark among the countries with the lowest women representation in leadership roles, even when compared with European countries outside the Nordics.

It is important to note that while some of the fundamental gender equality indicators in Exhibit 2 would be expected to predict gender-equal outcomes in the representation of women in leadership, the relationship is more complex and multiple other factors affect the outcomes along the career ladder. Denmark is part of the region that features some of the most gender-equal societies seen from the lens of access to education, financial inclusion, health outcomes and labour force participation, and understanding what drives the relatively low representation of women in leadership roles in Denmark is at the core of this research.

Compared to Nordic peers, Denmark has the highest perception of achieved equality in leadership positions in society, despite having the lowest share of women in leadership roles

In addition, there appears to be a notable divergence in societal perception of equality in leadership roles compared to the actual representation of women in

leadership roles. Based on EU's Eurobarometer survey from 2017, 58 per cent of Danes think that gender equality has been reached in leadership positions already, ranking Denmark among the countries with the most egalitarian perception of equality (Exhibit 3). The ranking exhibits that Denmark is also the country together with the Netherlands where the gap is largest as society overall perceives that equality has been achieved, whereas the actual share of women in management positions ranks significantly lower. Countries such as Sweden have a 'positive' gap, suggesting that their ranking in terms of perception of achieved equality is lower than the rank in terms of actual share of women in management positions. Denmark stands out as the country with the largest 'negative' gap. This implies that the society holds expectations, which are significantly more optimistic towards gender diversity in leadership roles compared to the evidence in the data.

The relatively lower share of women in managerial positions in Denmark compared to other Nordic countries has been present for a long time and with significant variation across sectors

The historical evolution of the share of women in managerial positions in Exhibit 4 reveals that Denmark ranks last in the Nordics at 29 per cent in 2021. The Danish gender equality paradox is also a long-standing issue since level differences in the share of women in leadership roles existed since the 2000s.

Exhibit 1

Timeline of gender equality measures across the Nordics

Denmark was the first country in the world to introduce **compulsory education for both sexes**

1814

Finland was the first country in the world to **grant women the right to vote** and be eligible for parliamentary elections

1906

Iceland was the first country in the world where **a woman was democratically elected as head of state**

1980

The largest **Danish companies** are required **to set targets, design policies and report on progress** on promoting gender balance

2012

Companies must obtain a **certificate** showing that they pay **equal wages for work of equal value to avoid fines**

2018

1892

Norway was the first country in the world to enact a **law on parental leave**[1]

1955

In 1955, **Sweden** was the first country in the world to enact a law on **paid maternity leave** and in 1974 followed this with **paid maternity leave**

2003

Norway was the first country in the world to introduce **gender quotas on boards** for publicly traded companies

2016

Sweden increased parent-specific leave: **90 days of parental leave are reserved for each parent**

1. The law granted women who worked in factories 6 weeks of maternity leave. The first laws on parental leave were enacted primarily to combat infant mortality

Sources: National legislation; Statistics Denmark; Nordic Council of Ministers; Nordic Statistical Committee

5   A ratio of one indicates that for every 100 men at the manager level, there is an equal number of 100 women: a ratio of one therefore indicates gender parity. Denmark's ratio of 0.45 indicates that for every 100 men, there are only 45 women at the manager level.

Exhibit 2

Comparison of gender equality indicators for selected countries

Level of gender equality: ■ Very high ■ High ■ Mid ■ Low

A ratio of 1 equals parity between genders

Gender equality in the workplace | Gender equality in society

	Labour force participation rate, women-to-men ratio, 2020	Paid working hours, women-to-men ratio[5]	Wage gap, women-to-men ratio of median earnings[5]	Share of women in board positions, women-to-men ratio, 2021	Share of women in management positions, women-to-men ratio, 2021[4]	Women, Business and the Law index, index 0-1[2], 2022	Financial inclusion, women-to-men ratio with a bank account, 2017	Political represent-tation, women-to-men ratio of members of parliament, 2020	Education level, women-to-men ratio of tertiary school enrolment, 2019	Health, women-to-men ratio of healthy life expectancy, 2019
🇩🇰 Denmark	0.87	0.75	0.95	0.54	0.41	1.00	1.00	0.66	1.28	1.01
🇸🇪 Sweden	0.90	0.88	0.93	0.61	0.77	1.00	1.01	0.89	1.38	1.01
🇳🇴 Norway	0.90	0.72	0.95	0.71	0.53	0.97	1.01	0.71	1.32	1.01
🇫🇮 Finland	0.88	0.84	0.83	0.54	0.58	0.98	1.00	0.85	1.16	1.03
🇳🇱 Netherlands	0.85	0.71	0.87	0.62	0.34	0.98	1.00	0.50	1.12[3]	1.00
🇬🇧 United Kingdom	0.85	0.70	0.88	0.61	0.61[1]	0.98	0.99	0.51	1.27	1.01
🇩🇪 Germany	0.83	0.71	0.86	0.56	0.42	0.98	1.00	0.45	1.02	1.04
🇦🇹 Austria	0.83	0.68	0.87	0.53	0.54	0.88	1.00	0.65	1.18	1.03
🇮🇹 Italy	0.69	0.60	0.92	0.63	0.42	0.97	1.00	0.56	1.26	1.02
🇫🇷 France	0.85	0.75	0.88	0.83	0.60	0.98	0.95	0.65	1.20	1.03
🇪🇸 Spain	0.82	0.71	0.91	0.48	0.51	1.00	0.96	0.79	1.18	1.02
🇱🇻 Latvia	0.82	0.77	0.80	0.29	0.85	1.00	0.98	0.43	1.28	1.10
🇧🇬 Bulgaria	0.79	N/A	0.97	0.28	0.62	1.00	1.04	0.36	1.20	1.08
🇭🇺 Hungary	0.73	0.74	0.90	0.10	0.60	0.91	0.92	0.14	1.19	1.07

1. Data computed as the average of Q1-Q3 2020 figures
2. The index measures how laws and regulations affect women's economic opportunities. Overall scores are calculated by taking the average score of each of the 8 areas (Going Places, Starting a Job, Getting Paid, Getting Married, Having Children, Running a Business, Managing Assets and Getting a Pension), with 1 representing the highest possible score
3. Data from 2018
4. Data computed as the average of Q1-Q4 2021 figures
5. Data from latest available year, 2018-2020

Source: World Bank; OECD; UNECE; Eurostat; European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

Over the past 10 years, the share of women in managerial positions has remained constant, growing at less than 0.5 per cent annually and the gap to the remaining Nordic countries has widened as they have experienced general growth. In 2001 the gap was nine percentage points between Denmark and the highest-ranking country –

Sweden, increasing to 14 percentage points by 2021.

The low share of women in manager positions is evident across all sectors in Denmark. As Exhibit 5 shows, even in the sectors where most of the employees are women, men predominantly hold the managerial roles. However, the sectors[6] with

Exhibit 3

Perception of achieved equality in leadership positions and actual share of women in management positions across countries

% answered "Yes" to "Do you think that gender equality has been achieved in leadership positions in companies and other organisations in your country?

Ⓧ Ranking among EU member states"

Non-exhaustive

		Perception of achieved gender equality in leadership positions, %, 2017		Actual share of women in management positions, %[1], 2021		Ranking gap between perceived and actual equality
🇱🇻	Latvia	69	①	46[2]	①	0
🇧🇬	Bulgaria	62	③	38[2]	⑥	-3
🇩🇰	Denmark	58	⑥	29	㉔	-18
🇫🇮	Finland	58	⑥	37	⑫	-6
🇦🇹	Austria	57	⑨	35	⑯	-7
🇳🇱	Netherlands	49	⑯	25	㉖	-10
🇭🇺	Hungary	44	⑲	38[2]	⑪	8
🇩🇪	Germany	43	㉑	30	⑳	1
🇸🇪	Sweden	38	㉕	43	②	23
🇮🇹	Italy	35	㉖	29	㉒	4
🇪🇸	Spain	27	㉗	34	⑱	9
🇫🇷	France	25	㉘	38	⑩	18

1. Numbers are rounded and computed as Q1-Q4 average;   2. Data from 2020 Q3
Source: Eurobarometer; Eurostat

6 Human health and social work; other service activities; education; and public administration; compulsory social security.

Exhibit 4

Evolution of women's share in leadership positions across Nordic countries, 2001 to 2021, per cent
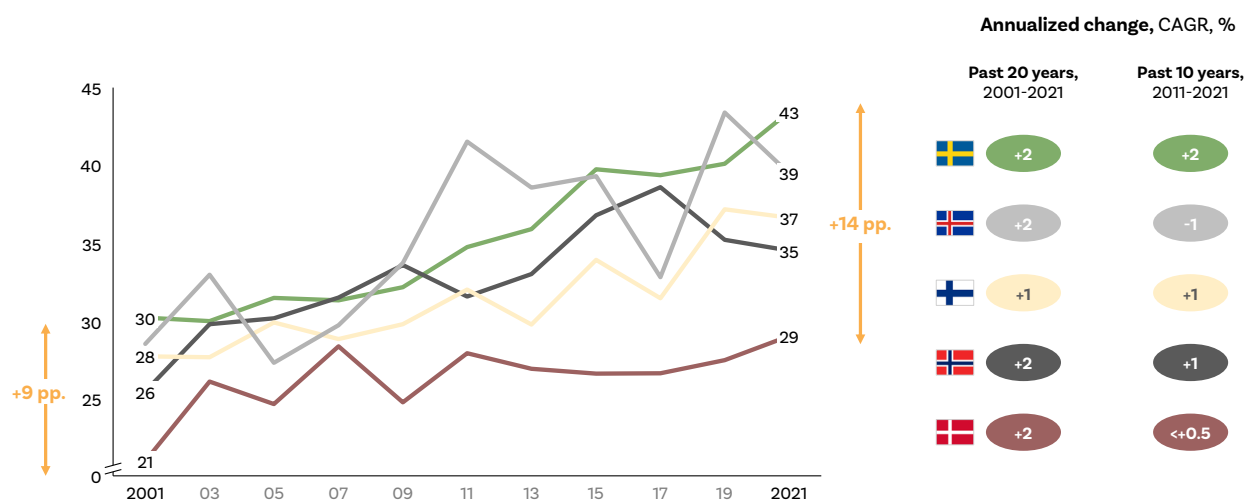
Source: Eurostat; The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

the highest share of women managers also employ a relatively higher share of women and feature relatively lower earnings compared to other sectors.[7]

Understanding the root causes behind the gender inequality in leadership roles requires a holistic analysis of the career lifecycle

Based on the evidence presented so far, Denmark has a comparatively low share of women in managerial roles across sectors despite having achieved gender equality across other fundamental areas of society such as educational attainment, labour force participation and health outcomes. The gender equality paradox in Denmark begs the question of what drives the lack of women at the top.

Our approach investigates the question by looking at critical steps across the career lifecycle. We label these as 'Inspire', 'Attract', 'Promote' and 'Retain' (Exhibit 6). The steps are not discrete moments in time but rather phases in one's career that at times overlap or intersect. We analyse them separately to identify factors that help explain the gender imbalance at each step. Chapter 2 analyses each step in the career lifecycle, and chapter 3 offers considerations to help reduce the gender gap.

- **Inspire: Making educational choices that are most conducive to managerial career paths.** At this critical step, women make choices on educational degree and professional development path to pursue before entering the labour market. Choices made at this stage determine the talent pipeline at the beginning of the funnel, and we investigate the underlying developments in educational choices and employment sector preferences.

- **Attract: Attracting talented women to managerial career paths.** At this stage, women decide whether to pursue a leadership career. This is the time when women also commit to skill development and consider trade-offs on the path to becoming managers. We investigate the motivating and discouraging factors for women to pursue leadership careers.

- **Promote: Promoting women to leadership roles.** At this step, women receive increased responsibility for managing others and transition to leadership or executive roles. In the analyses, we investigate the obstacles that women face when stepping up to managerial jobs, such as workplace practices, unpaid work and caregiving responsibilities, as well as the career support received at this critical stage.

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7   We find a negative correlation of -0.3 between average hourly remuneration and the share of women managers in a given sector. For example, the five highest-earning sectors all have less than 20 per cent women managers: Financial and insurance (19 per cent), mining and quarrying (8 per cent), electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (6 per cent), information and communications (10 per cent), and knowledge-based services (19 per cent).

Exhibit 5

**Women share of employees and managers
by sector in 2019**

Insights
- All sectors have less than 50% women managers
- All sectors have "leaks" in the pipeline as there are less
  women managers than women employees

Share of women employees ▢ Share of women managers ▢
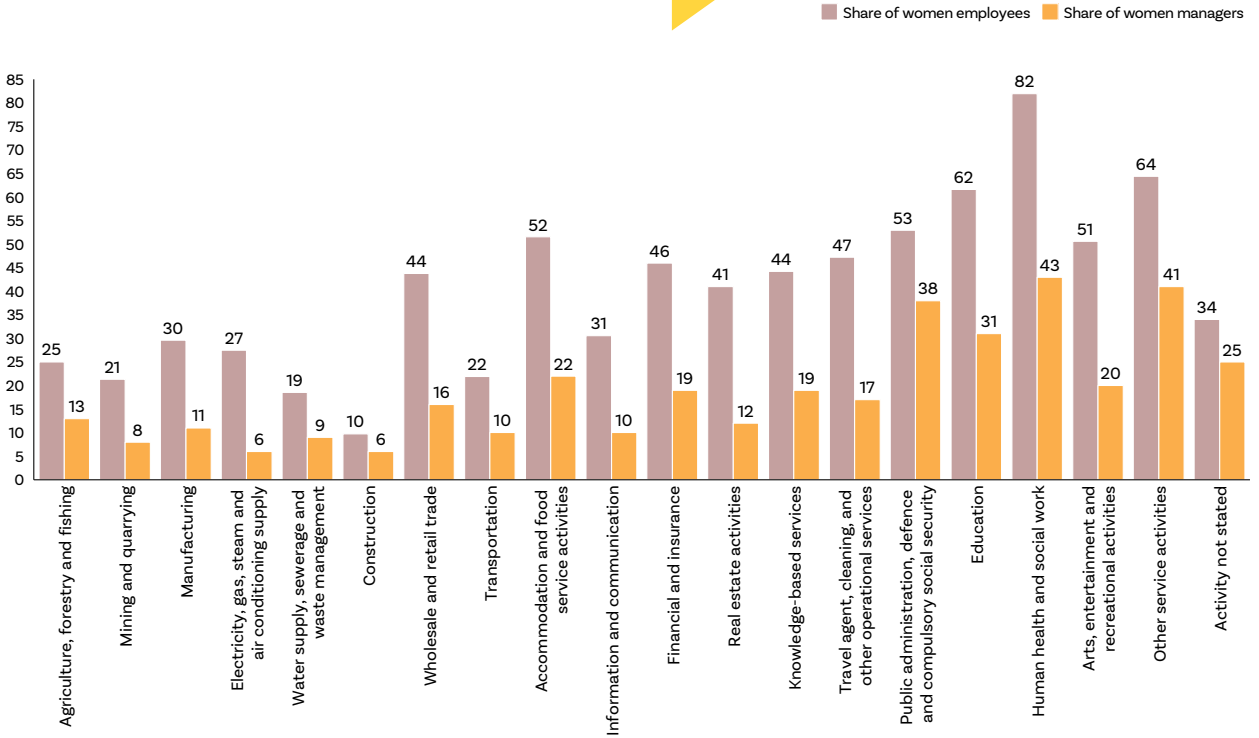
Source: Statistics Denmark; tables LIGEAB8 and LIGEDI8

- **Retain: Keeping women in leadership careers
  for the long run.** At this stage, the key objective
  is to retain women in managerial and executive
  careers upon being promoted and ensuring an
  inclusive environment at the workplace. The
  analyses investigate the impact of workplace
  inclusion, allyship, support and mentorship for
  women managers and executives.

Next, we turn to exploring the drivers behind the
gender equality paradox in Denmark.

Exhibit 6

Framework for analysing gender inequality across the career life cycle
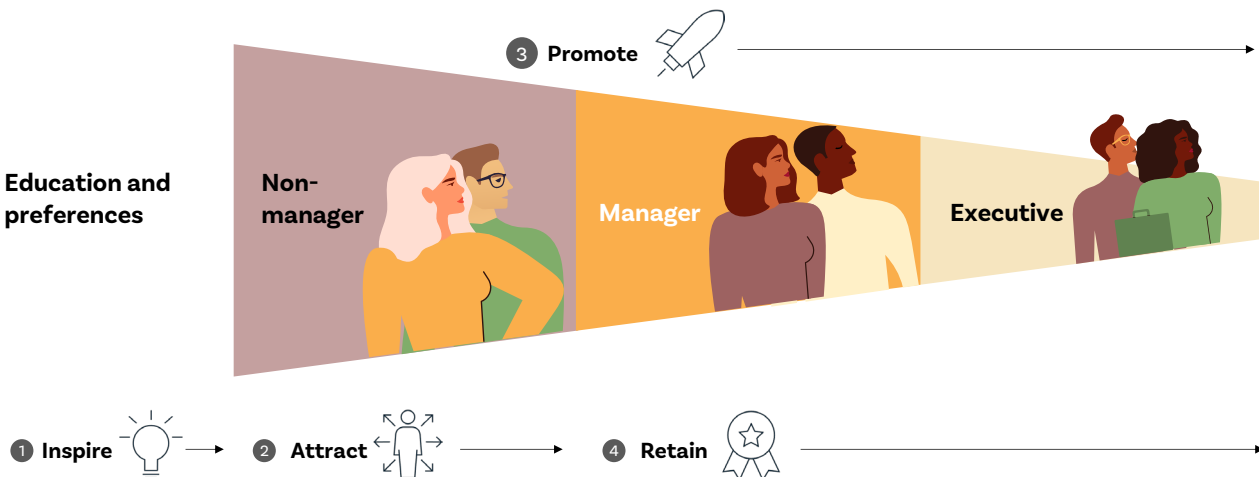
2. The drivers behind gender imbalances in leadership roles are complex, multifaceted and occur at each critical career step

We leverage multiple sources of insight to untangle what drives the gender equality paradox in Denmark. First, we employ a proprietary survey of 4,575 men and women in the workplace, conducted in Denmark to understand what holds women back from progressing along the career ladder. Second, we leverage country-level statistics and representative surveys to shed light on country-specific differences in norms, attitudes, and perceptions. Third, we analyse a unique dataset from Statistics Denmark, covering all tertiary education graduates in Denmark from 2008 to 2012, allowing us to track their individual career progression, educational, employment and occupational choices until 2020.

Career Choice Survey 2022

Timeframe: 4 March to 15 April (in waves)

Coverage: Diversity Council members and additional companies, covering both medium-sized to large private and public organisations in Denmark across industries such as: professional and financial services, information technology, transportation, consumer goods, industrial goods and services

Number of respondents: 4,575 (only Denmark-based) across different levels of the corporate hierarchy

Composition by role:
- 111 executives (2.4%) (e.g., Senior Vice President, Associate/Junior Partner, Partner, CFO, CEO, CTO, CHRO, etc.)
- 1,384 managers (30.3%) (e.g., Product Manager, Store Manager, Supervisor, Regional Manager, Division Manager, Lawyer with management responsibility, etc.)
- 3,080 non-managers (67.3%) (e.g., Analyst, Engineer, Paralegal/Lawyer, Operations Support, Cashier, Field Sales, etc.)

Composition by gender:
- 2,442 men (53.4%),
- 2,076 women (45.4%)
- 57 non-binary (1.2%)

Survey themes:
- Overall job satisfaction and happiness in the workplace
- Career path
- Flexible and family-friendly work environment
- Household composition and responsibilities
- Mentorship and sponsorship
- Wellness, mental health and burnout
- Managerial and organisational initiatives

<div style="background:orange">

Longitudinal registry data from Statistics Denmark

Analysis timeframe: 2008 to 2020 (annual observations)

Unit of observation: Individuals

Population: All higher education graduates in Denmark from 2008-2012 across all degrees

Available information:
- Anonymised unique personal identifier
- Gender
- Age
- Year of graduation
- Type of education and detailed degree name
- Employment sector and industry
- Detailed occupation
- Hourly wage
- Parental status and number of children

</div>

2.1 Inspire

We first analyse the talent pipeline and participation of women across sectors and educational degrees. As we outline in sub-chapter 2.2, managerial and executive roles require a complex set of skills, combining both hard and soft skills. For example, managers typically have to oversee financial performance of teams or business units, develop plans, conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses, build teams, mentor and lead employees towards a common goal. Hence, successful managers excel across multiple skill dimensions such as i) technical, ii) administrative, iii) human skills and iv) cooperative and orienting (citizenship behaviour) (Tonidandel, Braddy and Fleenor 2012). Therefore, degrees that provide exposure to subjects and areas where such skills can be developed might be helpful in paving the way to a leadership pathway.

Increasing the share of women in managerial and executive roles requires a robust talent pipeline both within relevant degrees and employment sectors at the very beginning of the funnel. At the 'Inspire' stage

Exhibit 7

Women's share of master's degree graduates and evolution of total number of graduates

🟨 Degrees with underrepresentation of women

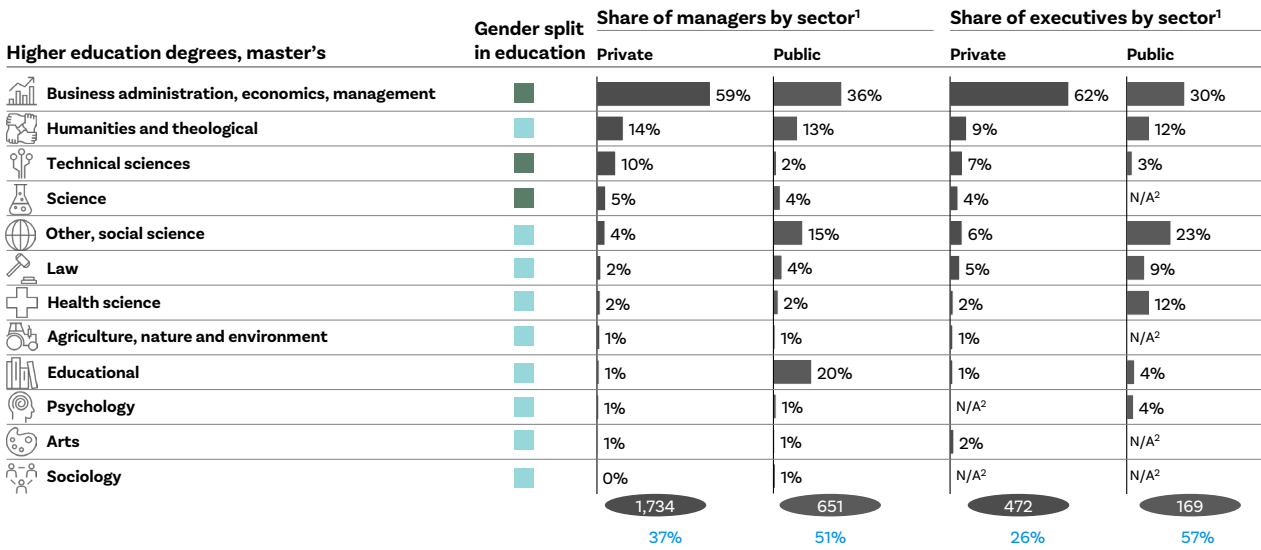| Higher education degree, master's[1]	Women share of graduates 2006	Women share of graduates 2021	Change in p.p. [3]	Total graduates in 2006	Total graduates in 2021	Change relative to 2006
Masters programmes	52%	56%	4%	12,826	24,424	~2x
Social science	51%	57%	5%	4,391	9,493	~2x
• Business administration, economics, management	42%	48%	6%	2,404	5,576	~2x
• Other, social science[2]	57%	61%	4%	738	1,357	~2x
• Law	57%	64%	6%	729	1,274	~2x
• Psychology	80%	82%	2%	425	769	~2x
• Sociology	76%	86%	10%	95	517	~5x
Technical sciences	24%	34%	10%	1,633	3,881	~2x
Humanities and theological	68%	68%	1%	2,687	3,417	~1.5x
Science	39%	46%	7%	1,311	2,701	~2x
Health science	63%	69%	6%	1,337	2,479	~2x
Educational	80%	84%	5%	203	879	~4x
Arts	55%	56%	1%	685	758	~1x
Agriculture, nature and environment	66%	69%	3%	373	654	~2x
Food, biotechnology and laboratory technology	79%	70%	-10%	73	162	~2x

1. Police, armed forces and defence master's degrees excluded from analysis
2. Includes: political science, anthropology, European studies, globalization programmes
3. Numbers are rounded

Source: Statistics Denmark

Exhibit 8

Educational background of managers and executives across private and public sector based on 2008 to 2009 MSc. graduates

X Number of managers/executives   X% - Share of women   ■ More men graduates   ■ More women graduates

Higher education degrees, master's	Gender split in education	Share of managers by sector[1]		Share of executives by sector[1]	
		Private	Public	Private	Public
📊 Business administration, economics, management	■	59%	36%	62%	30%
✊ Humanities and theological	■	14%	13%	9%	12%
👥 Technical sciences	■	10%	2%	7%	3%
⚗ Science	■	5%	4%	4%	N/A[2]
🌐 Other, social science	■	4%	15%	6%	23%
⚖ Law	■	2%	4%	5%	9%
✚ Health science	■	2%	2%	2%	12%
🚜 Agriculture, nature and environment	■	1%	1%	1%	N/A[2]
📚 Educational	■	1%	20%	1%	4%
🧠 Psychology	■	1%	1%	N/A[2]	4%
🎨 Arts	■	1%	1%	2%	N/A[2]
👥 Sociology	■	0%	1%	N/A[2]	N/A[2]
		1,734	651	472	169
		37%	51%	26%	57%

1. The sample only covers Master's graduate cohorts from 2008-2009 that became managers or executives by 2020
2. Due to anonymity reasons, shares not reported

Source: Statistics Denmark

men and women make the choice of what to study, what type of work to do and in which sector to work.

More women graduate than men across most higher education degrees, however, women are still underrepresented in degrees producing the most managers and executives

Over the past 15 years, Denmark has experienced a significant growth in the number of higher education graduates across all degrees. Compared to 2006, the number of master's degree graduates has doubled, and the share of women graduates has been increasing. Women today outnumber men across most degrees, with significant variation depending on the type of study.

Exhibit 7 shows that the proportion of women graduates has increased from 52 per cent to 56 per cent over the past 15 years. A closer look at the specific master's degrees reveals that women remain underrepresented in areas such as business administration, economics, management, technical and science degrees. Historically, these degrees have been perceived as more suitable for men due to gender stereotypes. These tend to be degrees leading to better paying jobs and the ones producing a significant share of graduates where men still outnumber women.

While the gap is narrowing in these selected degrees, the different educational choices among women

and men can be rationalised by two complementary theories. First, the relative lack of role-models of the same gender at the top of the career ladder with the above educational backgrounds helps explain why fewer women choose to pursue such degrees. The opposite examples of men role models with those degrees are abundant. Carrell et al. (2010) provide evidence using data from the U.S. Air Force Academy, where women students assigned to women academics for their intro courses in sciences, performed better and remained longer in the same technical or science employment field compared to women students assigned to professors who were men. Second, gender stereotypes play a role in defining educational choices. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain the different educational and occupational choices of women through the lens of role congruity theory. Members of a certain group would be more accepted and viewed better if their actions and behaviour match the group's social roles, determined by communal and agentic attributes. Social roles theory (Eagly 1987) indicates that communal attributes such as being kind, affectionate, gentle and sensitive are attributed more often to women. Agentic traits, such as being assertive, dominant and confident are more often attributed to men. Therefore, gender stereotypes play a role and influence the types of educational and employment choices that men and women make.

Exhibit 8 examines two graduate cohorts from 2008 and 2009 and looks at their career progression until

2020. Among those who became managers and executives in the private sector, 59 to 62 per cent had a business-related degree, followed by either a humanities background or technical science education. Three out of the top four degrees that produce the most managers or executives are also men-dominated. Despite women increasing their share, they still remain underrepresented in the degrees that have produced the most managers or executives, leading to gender imbalances already at the start of the talent pipeline.

Graduates who became managers or executives in the public sector came from more diverse backgrounds, as business-related degrees only account for one-third, whereas other social science degrees such as political science, law, humanities, health science and education degrees produce relatively more managers or executives in the public sphere. This is partially to be expected, as managers and executives in areas such as healthcare and education are developed from within the system, i.e., where medical staff or schoolteachers rise to become heads of hospitals or school principals, respectively.

In the private sector, where most of the managers and executives come from men-dominated degrees, the share of women in managerial and executive roles is significantly lower - 37 and 26 per cent, respectively. In the public sector, more diverse educational backgrounds make up the managerial and executive layer. Business-related degrees represent 30 to

36 per cent, and the rest of leaders come from predominantly women-dominated degrees.
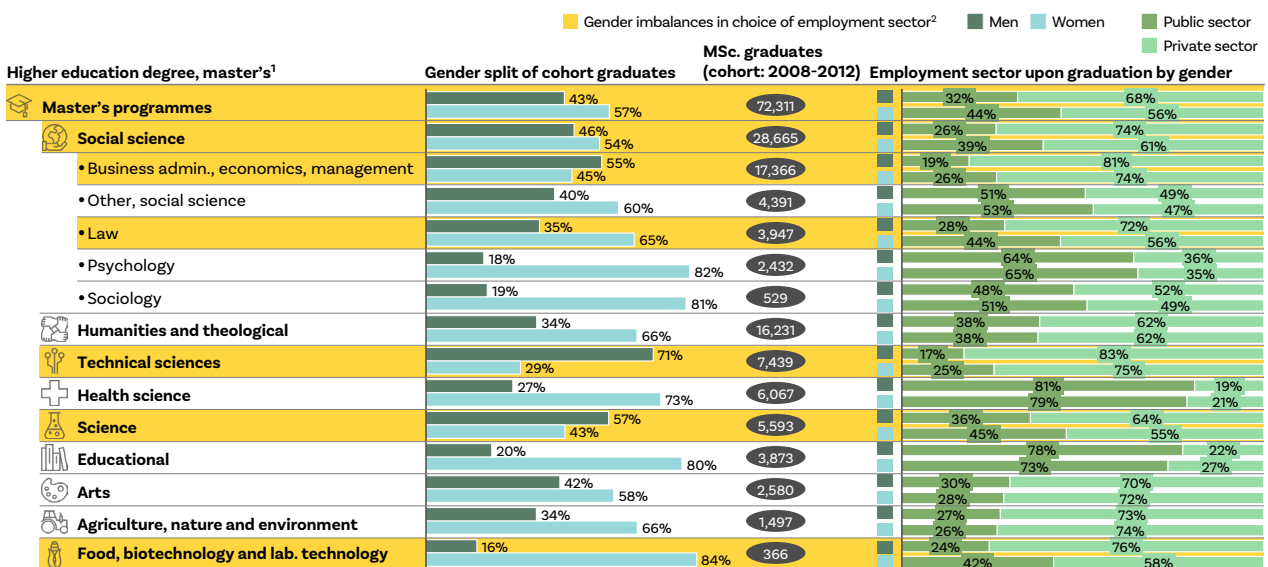
The notion of certain degrees such as technical sciences, science, business and economics being perceived as more attractive for men has been widely researched in the literature (Miller et al. 2018). Evidence suggests that much of the gender segregation of interests towards specific educational subjects develops already during childhood. Miller et al. (2018) conduct an extensive meta-analysis of 78 'Draw-a-scientist' studies and find that:

1 Children depict more often men as scientists starting from age 7 to 8 once they begin school and over children's age, the gap increases (four to one by the age of 14 to 15)
2 Over time, this gap has been shrinking as a result of the increased representation of women in sciences. Boys' likelihood of drawing a woman scientist rose by 400 per cent between 1985 and 2016, indicating the changing gender stereotypes

A larger share of men graduates enters the private sector compared to women with gaps remaining within social science, technical and scientific degrees, leading to talent pipeline imbalance

While current trends show that the gap between the number of men and women graduates is closing also in currently men-dominated degrees, a second

Exhibit 9

Choice of sectoral employment across graduate cohorts

Higher education degree, master's[1]	Gender split of cohort graduates (Men / Women)	MSc. graduates (cohort: 2008-2012)	Employment sector upon graduation by gender (Men: Public/Private; Women: Public/Private)
Master's programmes	43% / 57%	72,311	32% / 68%; 44% / 56%
Social science	46% / 54%	28,665	26% / 74%; 39% / 61%
• Business admin., economics, management	55% / 45%	17,366	19% / 81%; 26% / 74%
• Other, social science	40% / 60%	4,391	51% / 49%; 53% / 47%
• Law	35% / 65%	3,947	28% / 72%; 44% / 56%
• Psychology	18% / 82%	2,432	64% / 36%; 65% / 35%
• Sociology	19% / 81%	529	48% / 52%; 51% / 49%
Humanities and theological	34% / 66%	16,231	38% / 62%; 38% / 62%
Technical sciences	71% / 29%	7,439	17% / 83%; 25% / 75%
Health science	27% / 73%	6,067	81% / 19%; 79% / 21%
Science	57% / 43%	5,593	36% / 64%; 45% / 55%
Educational	20% / 80%	3,873	78% / 22%; 73% / 27%
Arts	42% / 58%	2,580	30% / 70%; 28% / 72%
Agriculture, nature and environment	34% / 66%	1,497	27% / 73%; 26% / 74%
Food, biotechnology and lab. technology	16% / 84%	366	24% / 76%; 42% / 58%

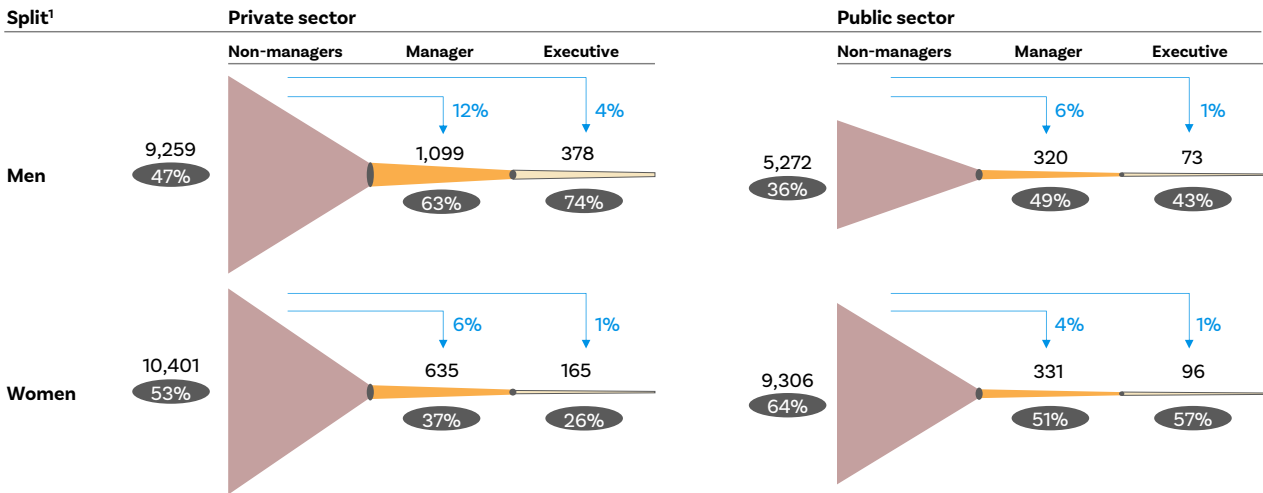Legend: Gender imbalances in choice of employment sector[2]; Men; Women; Public sector; Private sector

1. Excludes police, armed forces and defence master's degrees
2. Defined if difference in share of private sector exceeds 5pp between men and women within a degree

Source: Statistics Denmark

Exhibit 10

Career lifecycle and progression to leadership roles across gender and employment sector for all graduates from 2008 and 2009

X% - Probability of reaching role ⬤ X Share of total graduates within a role

Split[1]	Private sector			Public sector		
	Non-managers	Manager	Executive	Non-managers	Manager	Executive
Men	9,259 / 47%	12% → 1,099 / 63%	4% → 378 / 74%	5,272 / 36%	6% → 320 / 49%	1% → 73 / 43%
Women	10,401 / 53%	6% → 635 / 37%	1% → 165 / 26%	9,306 / 64%	4% → 331 / 51%	1% → 96 / 57%

1. Total number of MSc. graduates in 2008 and 2009 is 24,959. Sum of employees across sectors and roles do not sum to total graduates as over the period employees can switch across roles and sectors

Source: Statistics Denmark

component determining the talent pipeline for future managerial and executive roles is the choice of sectoral employment. Exhibit 9 analyses where master's graduates in 2008/2009 found employment upon finishing their degree. On aggregate 44 per cent of women graduates tend to enter the public sector, compared to only 32 per cent of men. These preferences are more pronounced especially in degrees such as business administration, economics and management, law, technical sciences and science. Except for law, these are also the degrees that are still dominated by men.

For example, there is a 10-percentage-point gap in the relative shares between men and women graduates in business administration, economics and management degrees. In addition, a lower share of men entered the public sector compared to women, adding an extra seven-percentage-point gap in the private sector (26 per cent of women graduates went to the public sector compared to only 19 per cent for men).

In the private sector, men graduates are around two times and around three times more likely to become managers and executives, respectively, compared to women. In the public sector, men are still around 1.5 times more likely to become managers and equally likely to become executives relative to women

To quantify the differences in making it to leadership roles between genders, we analyse over time the career progression of master's degree graduates

from 2008/2009 until 2020 and compare them to the initial pipeline of how many assumed a managerial or executive role in that time frame across the private and public sector.

Exhibit 10 shows that across all degrees, more women entered the private sector (53 per cent versus 47 per cent). However, only 6 per cent of women became managers at some point compared to 12 per cent of men. Hence, at the managerial level, two in three managers are men and the odds decrease for women further down the funnel, as only one per cent became executives relative to 4 per cent of men. In relative terms, men are approximately two times more likely to become managers (12 per cent versus 6 per cent) than women despite there being fewer men entering the private sector from the analysed cohorts. The relative differences are exacerbated even further when looking at executive roles, where men are around three times more likely to become executives. Those findings are in line with the results from our Career Choice Survey conducted in Denmark, where around 65 per cent of managers are reported to be men across participating companies.

From the 2008/2009 cohorts significantly more women entered the public sector upon graduation compared to men. However, despite men being underrepresented at the start of the funnel, they assume almost an equal share of managerial positions – 49 per cent vs. 51 per cent, implying that among all men with higher education who entered

Exhibit 11

Career lifecycle and progression to leadership roles across gender and employment sector for graduates from Business administration, Economics and Management degrees from 2008 and 2009

X% - Probability of reaching role   X   Share of total graduates within a role
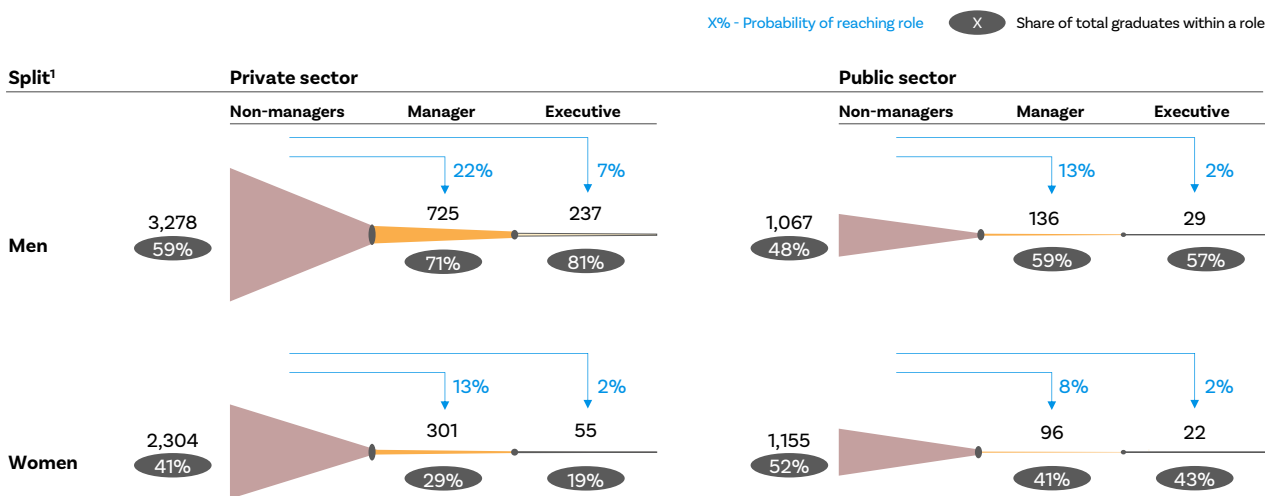
1. Total number of MSc. graduates in Business administration, Economics and Management in 2008 and 2009 is 6,182. Sum of employees across sectors and roles do not sum to total graduates as over the period employees can switch across roles and sectors

Source: Statistics Denmark

the public sector, 6 per cent of them became managers, whereas for women it was only 4 per cent. In the public sector, the relative gap in making it to a managerial position is smaller; however, women face lower odds in becoming managers even though 64 per cent of the entry level non-managers in the public sector were women.

Exhibit 11 focuses on the transition to managerial and executive roles for graduates from 2008/2009 that came from the degrees, which produced the most leaders - business administration, economics or management. This analysis takes into account that women may have different preferences and degree choices, which can have implications on the pathways towards managerial and executive careers. In Exhibit 11 we compare men and women who have the same educational background and who have self-selected into the same sector. Exhibit 12 visualises the results from the cohort analysis above and presents a simplified view of the career progression patterns of the 2008/2009 graduates across sectors.

The results show that the relative differences in career progression are smaller between genders when looking within an educational background; however, they remain significant in magnitude (see Table 1). This implies that preferences and different choices of degrees account for a small proportion of the gender

gap. The significantly lower probabilities for women to become managers and executives suggest that other drivers are predominantly at play throughout the career lifecycle. In sub-chapters 2.2-2.4, we discuss the key underlying factors behind the equality paradox.

The gender gap in managerial and executive roles cannot be closed based only on current trends of increasing share of women graduates in higher education and in degrees that are most conducive to leadership careers

Finally, a simulation analysis looks to what extent the underlying trends of i) more women graduating from master's degrees traditionally dominated by men and ii) increasing share of women entering the private sector can narrow the gap.

Exhibit 13 shows that with current trends, gender equality in the number of women graduates can be achieved within the next seven to nine years in two out of the four degrees historically producing the most leaders in the private sector. For example, the share of women graduates in business, economics and management is expected to equal that of males by 2026; however, parity in the share of women entering the private sector with the same degree would not be achieved before 2029. The gap appears more significant within technical science,[8] where in

8 See McKinsey & Company, 2018, for in-depth perspective on the drivers behind the talent gap within STEM degrees and jobs in Denmark.

Exhibit 12

Simplified view of the representation of women in the private and public sector for every 100 men graduates that enter the private sector

 Business administration, economics and management background   Other educational background

	Private sector		Public sector	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
Executive				
Managers				
Non-managers	For every 100 men entering the private sector as non-managers, 35 have a business-related degree	112 women enter the private sector, out of which 25 have a business-related degree	57 men enter the public sector as non-managers, out of which 12 have a business-related degree	101 women enter the public sector, out of which 12 have a business-related degree
	12 become managers and, out of those, 8 have a business-related degree	7 become managers and, out of those, 3 have a business-related degree	3 become managers and, out of those, 1 has a business-related degree	4 become managers and, out of those 1 has a business-related degree
	4 become executives with 3 of them having a business-related degree	1 becomes an executive and typically has a business-related degree	1 becomes an executive with an educational background other than business	1 becomes an executive with an educational background other than business

Source: Statistics Denmark

the former the share of women graduates would only reach around 43 per cent by 2033. Within sciences, parity between graduates would be achieved by 2029.

While those positive trends contribute to closing the gap and ensuring a more equally distributed talent pipeline, they alone are insufficient to resolve the gender imbalance at managerial and executive level that occurs further down the career funnel.

2.2 Attract

This sub-chapter establishes the broad requirements for managerial and executive roles while also analysing the ambition and underlying drivers of motivation/deterrents of men and women for pursuing such roles. 'Attract' is the stage at which men and women determine their career ambitions, occupational choices and decide whether to pursue leadership careers.

Exhibit 13

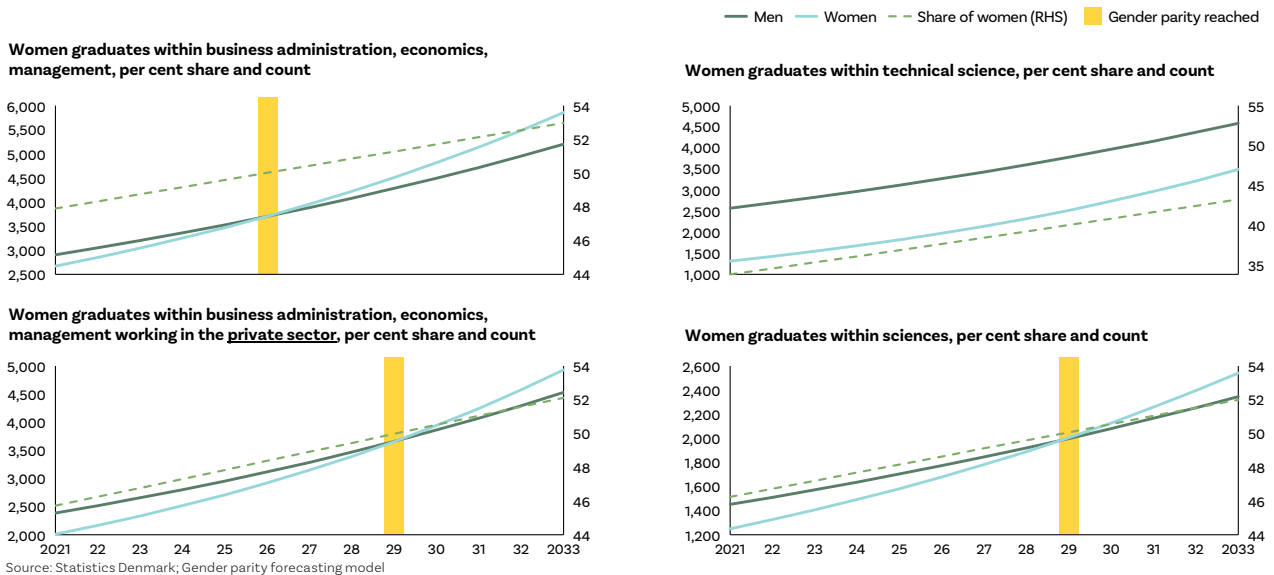**Forecast of women's share among graduates across educational backgrounds**

—— Men —— Women - - - Share of women (RHS) ▮ Gender parity reached

Women graduates within business administration, economics, management, per cent share and count

Women graduates within technical science, per cent share and count

Women graduates within business administration, economics, management working in the private sector, per cent share and count

Women graduates within sciences, per cent share and count

Source: Statistics Denmark; Gender parity forecasting model

Table 1

Comparison of probabilities of becoming a manager or executive across degrees versus business, economics or managerial degrees only

	Probability of becoming a manager				Probability of becoming an executive			
	With any degree (across all masters degrees)		With a business, economics or management degree		With any degree (across all masters degrees)		With a business, economics or management degree	
	In the private sector	In the public sector	In the private sector	In the public sector	In the private sector	In the public sector	In the private sector	In the public sector
Men	~12%	~6%	~22%	~13%	~4%	~1%	~7%	~3%
Women	~6%	~4%	~13%	~8%	~1%	~1%	~2%	~2%
Ratio between probabilities (men/women)	1.9x	1.7x	1.7x	1.5x	3.2x	1.3x	3.0x	1.4x

Source: Statistics Denmark; database of graduate cohorts: 2008-2009

Managerial and executive roles require a complex set of skills, taking significant effort and time to master

In today's world, business outcomes are influenced by factors such as constantly new emerging technologies, increasing geopolitical uncertainty, value-chain disruptions, energy transition and climate change. A complex set of skills is required for managerial and executive roles to navigate the heightened uncertainty, complexity and rapid pace of change. Transitioning from a managerial role to a top executive role particularly increases the scope and complexity of the job (Watkins 2012). Gartner (2019) reports that the demands for executives that master both soft and hard skills are growing, with the most notably emerging high-demand skills ranging from design thinking, strategic management and adaptability on the soft side, and artificial intelligence and data analytics on the hard side. Becoming a high-performing executive relies strongly on one's ability to effectively manage time and, more importantly, make decisions so others can manage their time to produce the best results and outcomes (Drucker 2002). Developing and mastering the skill sets required for the role while also executing the role effectively takes significant effort and experience. Given the nature of the skills, they are typically developed through years or decades of exposure to different strategic roles and cross-functional projects, and therefore less straightforward to teach

and acquire through formal education. Therefore, the breadth and depth of experiences are important for managers and especially executives to rely on when faced with uncertainty and constant need for change.

Based on the analysis of a 2008/2009 cohort of graduates in Denmark, becoming a leader takes significant time and experience: men are, on average, 39.3 years old when they get their first executive role, while women are, on average, 40.3 years old. The averages reflect the time it takes to become managers and executives for more recent graduate cohorts as the cohorts could only be observed until 2020; a subpopulation of graduates may become managers or executives at a slower rate. Hence, the 39 to 40 years of age for becoming managers/executives should be viewed as a lower bound and does not reflect the average of all managers and executives in Denmark.

Men and women appear equally ambitious about wanting to become leaders, but they have different concerns and motivational drivers for the managerial and executive roles

The significant effort, skill development and experience required to be able to perform in an executive role naturally entail frequent reprioritisation of time, including having less

Exhibit 14

Share of men and women who want to reach managerial/leadership and executive positions[1]

	Men	Women
Share of employees who want to become a manager or leader	57%	52%
Share of employees who want to become a top executive	30%	27%

1. Numbers are rounded

Note: sample sizes: n = 3,433 respondents answered if they want to become a manager/leader (excl. those who are already leaders), n = 4,248 respondents answered if they want to become

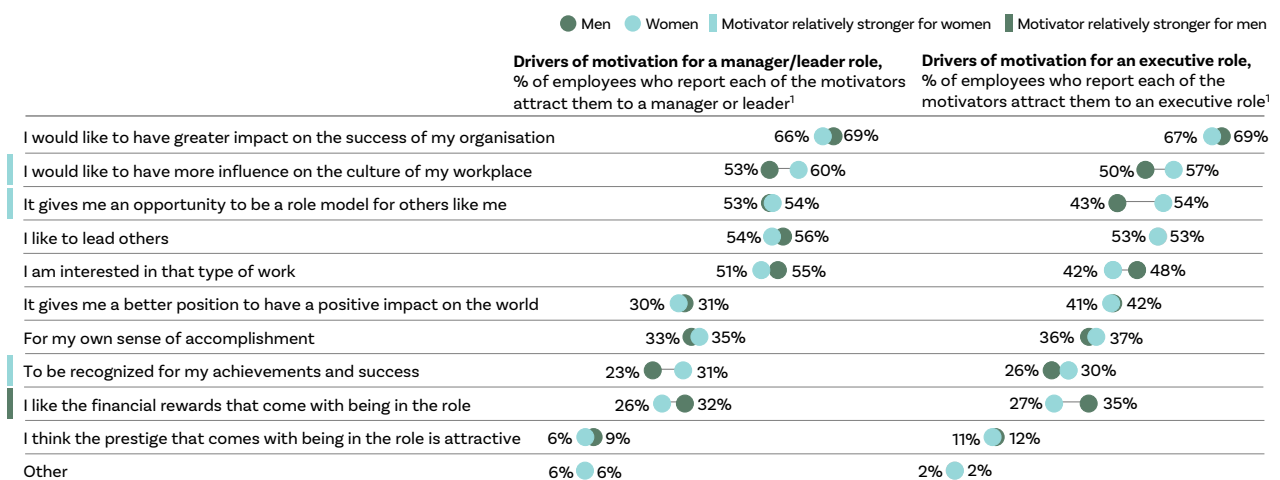Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

time to spend on and less flexibility around other responsibilities and personal activities. The elevated requirements to sustain an executive/managerial role cater to a much smaller proportion of employees who believe the trade-offs are worthwhile. The survey analysis finds that men and women have similar ambition levels to become leaders and executives as shown in Exhibit 14. 57 per cent of men

and 52 per cent of women respond that they want to be a leader or a manager, and 30 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women respond that they want to be a top executive, respectively.

The survey analysis finds that both men and women are motivated to bring success to their organisation while also influencing workplace culture and role modelling for others (Exhibit 15). However, it appears that women are significantly more motivated to be a role model for others compared to men, especially at the executive level: 54 per cent of women report role modelling as a motivator for the executive role and only 42 per cent of men do. In comparison, men appear to be more motivated by the financial rewards that come with both being a manager and a top executive compared to women despite this not being among the top-ranked motivators for either gender. This notion is consistent with the observation that the Nordic countries are among the wealthiest societies with developed welfare systems, which contribute to reduced inequality; thus, financial aspects of the managerial and executive jobs appear to have a limited impact on

Exhibit 15

Drivers of motivation for managerial/leader and executive roles across genders

● Men ● Women ▮ Motivator relatively stronger for women ▮ Motivator relatively stronger for men

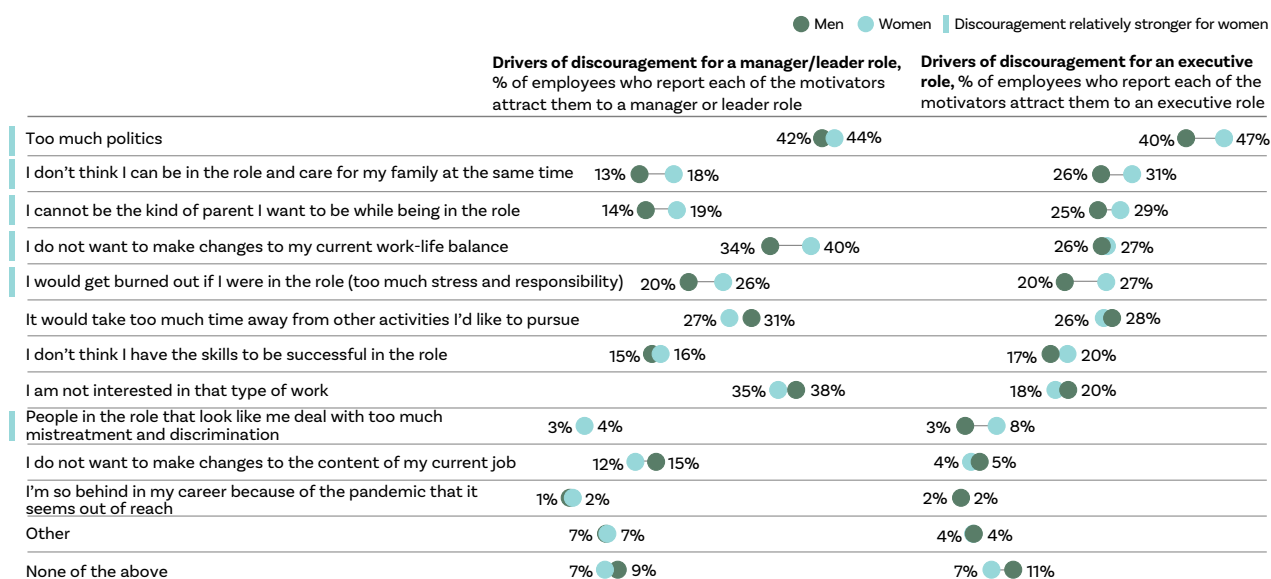|	Drivers of motivation for a manager/leader role, % of employees who report each of the motivators attract them to a manager or leader[1]	Drivers of motivation for an executive role, % of employees who report each of the motivators attract them to an executive role[1]
I would like to have greater impact on the success of my organisation	66% ● ● 69%	67% ● ● 69%
I would like to have more influence on the culture of my workplace	53% ● ● 60%	50% ● ● 57%
It gives me an opportunity to be a role model for others like me	53% ● ● 54%	43% ● ● 54%
I like to lead others	54% ● ● 56%	53% ● 53%
I am interested in that type of work	51% ● ● 55%	42% ● ● 48%
It gives me a better position to have a positive impact on the world	30% ● 31%	41% ● 42%
For my own sense of accomplishment	33% ● ● 35%	36% ● ● 37%
To be recognized for my achievements and success	23% ● ● 31%	26% ● ● 30%
I like the financial rewards that come with being in the role	26% ● ● 32%	27% ● ● 35%
I think the prestige that comes with being in the role is attractive	6% ● 9%	11% ● 12%
Other	6% ● 6%	2% ● 2%

1. Numbers are rounded

Note: analysis for drivers of motivation for a manager/leader role includes respondents who 1) already are or want to become a leader/manager, and 2) selected that they do not want to become a top executive (sample sizes: n = 828 for men and n = 656 for women). Analysis for drivers of motivation for an executive role includes respondents who already are or want to become a top executive (sample sizes: n = 859 for men and n = 644 for women)

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 16

Drivers of deterrents for a managerial/leader role and an executive role across genders

● Men ● Women ▌Discouragement relatively stronger for women

	Drivers of discouragement for a manager/leader role, % of employees who report each of the motivators attract them to a manager or leader role	Drivers of discouragement for an executive role, % of employees who report each of the motivators attract them to an executive role
Too much politics	42% ● ● 44%	40% ● — ● 47%
I don't think I can be in the role and care for my family at the same time	13% ● — ● 18%	26% ● — ● 31%
I cannot be the kind of parent I want to be while being in the role	14% ● — ● 19%	25% ● — ● 29%
I do not want to make changes to my current work-life balance	34% ● — ● 40%	26% ● 27%
I would get burned out if I were in the role (too much stress and responsibility)	20% ● — ● 26%	20% ● — ● 27%
It would take too much time away from other activities I'd like to pursue	27% ● ● 31%	26% ● ● 28%
I don't think I have the skills to be successful in the role	15% ◐ 16%	17% ● ● 20%
I am not interested in that type of work	35% ● ● 38%	18% ● ● 20%
People in the role that look like me deal with too much mistreatment and discrimination	3% ● 4%	3% ● — ● 8%
I do not want to make changes to the content of my current job	12% ● ● 15%	4% ● 5%
I'm so behind in my career because of the pandemic that it seems out of reach	1% ● 2%	2% ● 2%
Other	7% ● 7%	4% ● 4%
None of the above	7% ● ● 9%	7% ● ● 11%

Note: analysis for drivers of discouragement for a manager or leader role includes respondents who 1) are not already a leader/manager, and 2) do not want to become a top executive (sample sizes: n = 1,299 for men and n = 1,241 for women). Analysis for drivers of discouragement for an executive role includes respondents who are not already and do not want to become a top executive (sample sizes: n = 1,633 for men and n = 1,273 for women)

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

the attractiveness of these jobs compared to other regions such as Eastern Europe.[9]

Gender differences become even more apparent when men and women report their concerns and deterrents regarding managerial and executive roles. A higher share of men and women report concerns about having an executive role compared to a managerial/leader role, and these concerns are especially greater for women (Exhibit 16).

For the managerial roles, the survey analysis finds that men and women are most discouraged by internal company politics, reported by 42 to 44 per cent of the respondents. In addition, women appear to be much more discouraged by having to change their current work-life balance, take on more responsibilities and risk burning out more compared to men.

Exhibit 16 further shows that the increase in responsibilities and risk of burning out are also significantly stronger deterrents for women compared to men. This suggests that women are facing higher invisible barriers than men when they climb the career ladder, which we explore in later chapters by also looking at how household and caregiving responsibilities influence career advancement and how senior leaders are taking action to support

women's career progression. For the executive role, both men and women are most discouraged by internal company politics. However, this appears to be a much stronger concern for women compared to men: while 47 per cent of the women report this as a discouragement, only 40 per cent of men do.

Compared to men, women are also generally more concerned about making changes to their current work-life balance and being less able to care for family while being a manager/leader or an executive (Exhibit 16). To further understand possible reasons behind the gender differences in not pursuing managerial careers, we explore the role of gender norms, societal attitudes on primary caregiving responsibilities and stereotypical behaviour.

Gender stereotypes influence the choices and preferences of women and men in society

Choices made by men and women early on in life, such as education and employment sector are not randomly driven but are rather shaped by multiple factors, such as social norms, gender stereotypes and individual gender preferences. These choices also influence labour market outcomes. Humlum, Nandrup and Smith (2019) find that gender identity
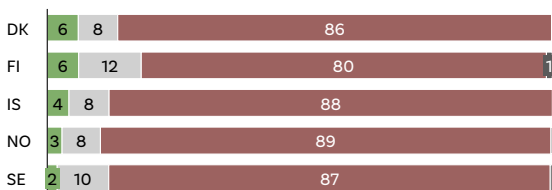
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9 For example, the hourly wage ratio between a managerial and a skilled manual job in 2020 was around 2.00 in the Nordics: 1.91 in Denmark; 1.96 in Norway and 2.04 in Sweden, whereas in Eastern European countries it was 2.96 in Bulgaria, 2.76 in Hungary and 2.25 in Latvia (based on Eurostat data).
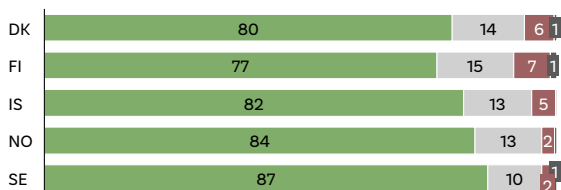
Exhibit 17

Gender attitudes and norms across Nordic countries, 2012, per cent of respondents

Attitudes towards gender roles in family income

A1. Men's job is to earn money, women's job is to take care of the home (women respondents)[1]
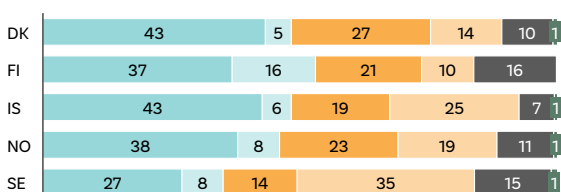
	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Can't choose
DK	6	8	86	
FI	6	12	80	1
IS	4	8	88	
NO	3	8	89	
SE	2	10	87	

A2. Both the man and women should contribute to the household income[1]

	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Can't choose
DK	80	14	6	1
FI	77	15	7	1
IS	82	13	5	
NO	84	13	2	
SE	87	10	1	2

■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree/strongly disagree ■ Can't choose

Attitudes towards running a family with children under school age

B1. What is the best way to organise family and work life with a child under school age?[1]

	Mother part-time, father full-time	Mother at home, father full-time	Both mother and father full-time	Both mother and father part-time	Can't choose	Father part-time, mother full-time
DK	43	5	27	14	10	1
FI	37	16	21	10	16	
IS	43	6	19	25	7	1
NO	38	8	23	19	11	1
SE	27	8	14	35	15	1

■ Mother part-time, father full-time ■ Both mother and father part-time
■ Mother at home, father full-time ■ Can't choose
■ Both mother and father full-time ■ Father part-time, mother full-time

B2. If both parents are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?[1]
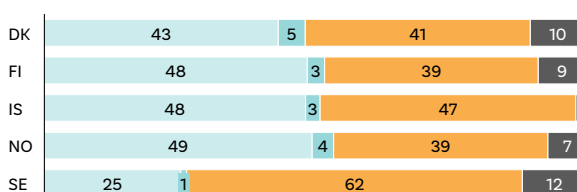
	Mother most, father some	Mother entire, father not any	Mother and father half	Can't choose
DK	43	5	41	10
FI	48	3	39	9
IS	48	3	47	2
NO	49	4	39	7
SE	25	1	62	12

■ Mother most, father some ■ Can't choose
■ Mother entire, father not any ■ Father entire, mother not any
■ Mother and father half

Attitudes towards women and working mothers

C1. A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works[1]

	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Can't choose
DK	20	9	71	1
FI	16	12	70	1
IS	11	13	75	1
NO	10	13	76	1
SE	10	15	72	2
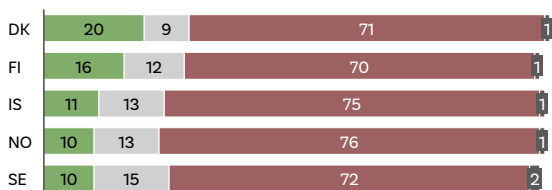
C2. All in all, family life suffers when the women has a full-time job[1]

	Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Can't choose
DK	19	8	73	1
FI	13	11	75	1
IS	15	17	67	1
NO	20	16	62	1
SE	14	14	71	2
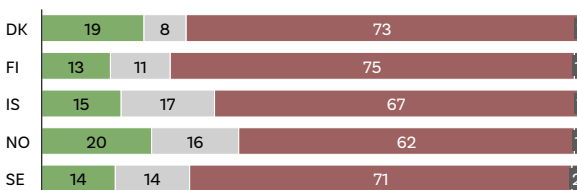
■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree/strong disagree ■ Can't choose

1. Numbers are rounded

Source: ISSP survey – DK; FI; NO; SE; IS (2012)

and norms tend to stick and help explain the persistent gender gaps in career outcomes. Using detailed registry data for Denmark, the authors show a significant intergenerational correlation between the choices made by parents and their children. For example, they find that sons mostly reflect fathers' choices and behaviours, while girls reflect the behaviour of both parents but stronger so of the mother. This implies that established norms, preferences and behaviours within families can carry over to the following generations. Brenøe and Lundberg (2018) show that the transmission of preferences and choices display strong same-sex correlations across family generations, especially when it comes to labour market behaviour.

This poses a significant challenge from a policy perspective as such norms and strong transmission mechanisms are difficult to change.
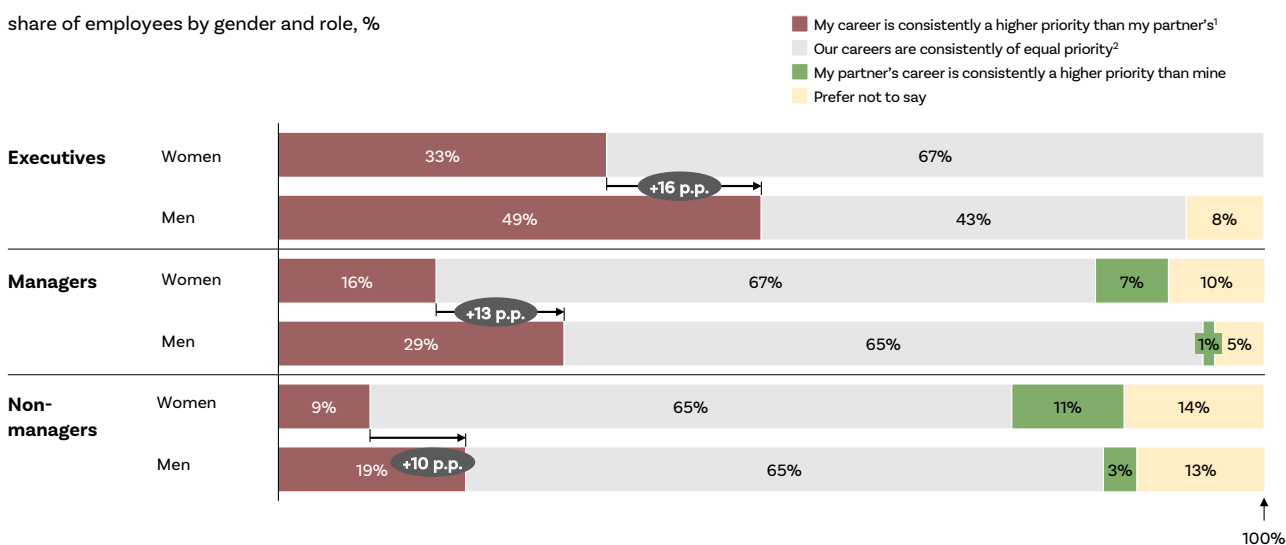
Gender norms are a powerful source that can shape gender roles in society. We leverage representative survey data from 2012 run by ISSP, covering 6,500 respondents, equally distributed and weighted across the five Nordic countries[10], to investigate the perceptions with regards to three general gender stereotype themes:

i) Attitudes towards gender roles in family income
ii) Attitudes towards running a family with small children

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10 Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland are included in the survey analysis. The survey is conducted every 10 years; the latest release of the survey from 2012 was used for the report and can be found in the ISSP (2016) publication.

Exhibit 18

Career balancing within the household across gender and roles

share of employees by gender and role, %

- My career is consistently a higher priority than my partner's[1]
- Our careers are consistently of equal priority[2]
- My partner's career is consistently a higher priority than mine
- Prefer not to say

Executives	Women	33%	67%	
	Men	49% (+16 p.p.)	43%	8%
Managers	Women	16%	67%	7% 10%
	Men	29% (+13 p.p.)	65%	1% 5%
Non-managers	Women	9%	65%	11% 14%
	Men	19% (+10 p.p.)	65%	3% 13%

100%

1. Incl. respondents stating 'My partner does not work'
2. Juggled on a day-to-day basis, or we take turns prioritizing one partner's career for extended periods of time (e.g. months)
Note: sample sizes: n = 27 women executives, n = 420 women managers, n = 971 women non-managers, n = 51 men executives, n = 583 men managers and n = 1,071 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

iii) Attitudes towards family life with working women and mothers

As more recent surveys and data are not available, we believe that the results from 2012 are generally representative today, given the evidence that gender stereotypes, cultural norms and attitudes tend to stick and take a significant time to change.

In section A1 of Exhibit 17, 87 to 89 per cent of women in Iceland, Norway and Sweden do not agree that 'Men's job is to earn money, and women's job is to take care of home', whereas for Denmark and Finland, this share is between 80 to 86 per cent. The differences are more pronounced when looking at section A2, where 80 out of 100 people in Denmark believe that women and men should contribute to the household income, whereas in Norway and Sweden, the share is higher at 84 to 87 per 100. Taken together, the facts suggest that while it is generally accepted and expected for women to participate in economic life and contribute to household income, in countries such as Denmark and Finland, this perception is less strong, compared to the rest of the Nordics, especially Sweden.

Sections B1 and B2 explore the attitudes on work-life balance and split of childcaring responsibilities. Denmark is the country where the highest share of respondents, 43 per cent, indicating that set-ups where fathers work full-time and mothers part-time are seen as most desirable, followed by full-time work

both for fathers and mothers, 27 per cent. In Sweden only 27 per cent and 14 per cent share the same view, respectively. The notion of a part-time working mother and father is more widely accepted across Sweden, Norway and Iceland (35 to 25 per cent) compared to Denmark and Finland (10 to 14 per cent). This suggests that in Denmark, the majority perceives the best family organisation to be one where the father works full-time while the mother is also economically involved mainly through a part-time or, to a lesser extent, full-time job. In Sweden, family organisation is seen as more equal, with the expectation that both fathers and mothers work part-time or full-time. In addition, the common perception is that parental leave should be split in half between parents (62 per cent), whereas across the remaining Nordic countries only between 39 to 47 per cent see this as the preferred split, with Denmark having a similar mix to Finland and Norway.

Finally, looking at the attitudes towards working women and mothers in C1 and C2, it appears that in Denmark a larger proportion of respondents sees a concern for children or family life when women are working. One in five women in Denmark – the highest share among Nordic countries, agrees that a preschool child would suffer if the mother were working, whereas in Sweden, Norway and Iceland this share is two times smaller. A similar share of people believes that a full-time working mother is not ideal for family life.

The evidence across the three themes of social norms

'In my neighbourhood, it is accepted to outsource household chores, but it is very frowned upon to have (paid) help for children. It is more accepted if grandparents help with children but not if one pays for external help.'

— Woman in executive role with children

indicates that Sweden has the strongest egalitarian expectations towards genders. It is expected for both men and women to be involved in contributing to household income, sharing parental leave equally and view a model where both parents work in equal proportions as most desirable. Denmark, together with Finland and Norway, appears to have less egalitarian social norms that showcase patterns of more traditional gender roles.

The findings for Denmark are also consistent with the Career Choice Survey results, where women reported disproportionately greater concern for not being able to care for their family and children compared to men. In addition, Exhibit 18 shows that men rarely have partners whose career is more highly prioritised than their own (0 to 3 per cent of men across seniority levels reported that their partner's career is consistently a higher priority). In contrast, even when women reach the executive level they predominately live in a dual-career household, i.e., their partner's career is of equal priority (reported by 67 per cent of women executives). The presented evidence on gender attitudes is also supported by Exhibit 18 where men's career is in general seen as being more important.

An important question is to what extent gender stereotypes determine outcomes at managerial and executive levels. In this context, one definition of stereotype is 'widely held but fixed and oversimplified image of a particular type of person or thing' (Bordalo et al. 2016). It is helpful to distinguish between two types of stereotypes that can influence the perception of a person or society group: i) descriptive stereotyping and ii) prescriptive stereotyping. Descriptive stereotyping deals with how men and women typically act, whereas prescriptive stereotyping deals with how men and women should typically act (Koenig 2018). The prescriptive type is of particular interest when investigating the question of why women are underrepresented in leadership positions as strongly established social norms lead

to an expectation of how women should act or behave in society, at home and at work. Such gender stereotypes can have a direct impact on women's choice to pursue a managerial or leadership career if society typically attributes such careers with men and masculine traits.

Smith, Eriksson and Smith (2021) investigate the prevalence of gender stereotypes among Danish managers and find significant evidence of gender-stereotyping attitudes and beliefs about own managerial skills. The key finding is that women managers rank themselves lower compared to men on masculine management traits[11] (e.g., determined, in self-control, willing to take risk, competitive, confident) and higher on feminine management traits (e.g., socially competent, dialogue-oriented, helpful). In addition, women hold fewer gender stereotypical attitudes of what defines a successful manager compared to men.

A relevant finding is that regardless of gender, firms with a stronger focus on work-life balance have fewer stereotypical attitudes. This implication is important for organisations as promoting policies aimed at making the workplace more inclusive and with greater focus on work-life balance may help alleviate and soften entrenched gender biases.

2.3 Promote

In the 'Promote' step, men and women make the transition into roles with a higher degree of responsibility by managing and leading teams; this is also a critical step in understanding the factors that could drive to the drop-off of women from leadership career paths. We investigate i) the perceived fairness of promotions in today's career ladder design, ii) the support men and women receive to advance their careers and iii) factors such as split of caregiving responsibilities and unpaid work.

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11 Smith, Eriksson and Smith (2021) based the categorization of traits on Gmür (2006).

'I do think I get presented with more opportunities compared to my immediate female peers because I don't have children. My managers assume I am more flexible'

— Woman in managerial role without children

Among surveyed companies, women are less likely to become managers and executives compared to men

The survey analysis finds that for every 100 men who are promoted to manager, only 76 women are promoted to manager. Moreover, for every 10 men in managerial positions who become executives, approximately five women managers become executives (Exhibit 19).[12]

These findings are in line with the analysis of the career progression of all graduates from 2008 and 2009 in Denmark, as discussed in sub-chapter 2.1, where women face worse odds in climbing the career ladder than men. Comparing the results from both sources, the Career Choice Survey and the population of higher education graduates, establish a lower and upper bound to the likelihood of women becoming managers and executives. The analysis of graduates reveals that for 100 men promoted to managers, 58 women are promoted to managers in the private sector (male manager share of 63%, see Exhibit 12), whereas the survey results report higher odds for women, with 76 women being promoted to managers for every 100 men.

A larger share of surveyed women disagree that today's design of the career ladder is fair compared to men

Exhibit 20 shows that women generally perceive career advancement opportunities as less fair and objective compared to men. Women's scepticism towards the fairness of the system becomes even stronger as they climb the career ladder. For example, while close to 40 per cent of women executives strongly or somewhat disagree that promotions are based on fair and objective criteria, only 19 per cent of men executive counterparts share the same belief. In addition, while 32 per cent of women executives strongly or somewhat disagree that they have equal opportunity for advancement compared to their

Exhibit 19

The likelihood of becoming a manager and executive for men and women

For every 100 men who are promoted to manager…
…76 women are promoted to manager

For every 10 men managers who are promoted to executive…
…~5 women managers are promoted to executive

Men   Women   Men   Women

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

12 Women's advancement into manager and executive roles is further reflected in the share of women in the boardroom: Smith and Parrotta (2018) studied Danish private sector companies and found that a connection exists between the proportion of women among top executives (CEOs or VPs) in a given industry and women's representation in boardrooms.
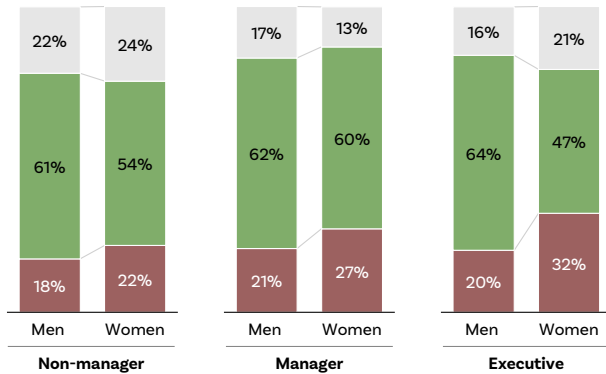
Exhibit 20

Perception of fairness of advancement opportunities and promotions

<div style="text-align:right">
□ Neither agree nor disagree[1]
■ Strongly or somewhat agree
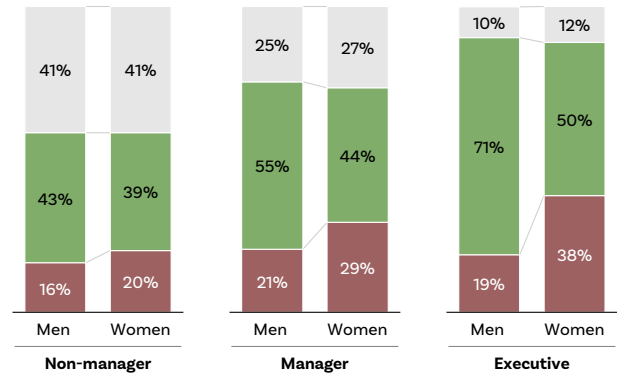■ Strongly or somewhat disagree
</div>

Perceived fairness of opportunities for advancement

% of employees who believe they have equal opportunity for advancement compared to their peers in their organisation[2]

	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	24%		17%	13%		16%	21%
Strongly or somewhat agree	61%	54%		62%	60%		64%	47%
Strongly or somewhat disagree	18%	22%		21%	27%		20%	32%
	Non-manager			**Manager**			**Executive**	

Perceived fairness of promotions

% of employees who believe promotions at their organisation are based on fair and objective criteria[2]

	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women
Neither agree nor disagree	41%	41%		25%	27%		10%	12%
Strongly or somewhat agree	43%	39%		55%	44%		71%	50%
Strongly or somewhat disagree	16%	20%		21%	29%		19%	38%
	Non-manager			**Manager**			**Executive**	

1. Includes 'Don't know' responses for employees answering whether they have equal opportunity for advancement compared to their peers in their organisation
2. Numbers are rounded
Note: sample sizes: n = 34 women executives, n = 571 women managers, n = 1,363 women non-managers, n = 69 men executives, n = 748 men managers and n = 1,492 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

peers in their organisation, only 20 per cent of men in executive positions share the same view. When comparing men and women at the non-managerial level, the differences in perceived fairness of the system appear to be relatively small across genders. This suggests that women face higher invisible barriers as they transition to more senior leadership roles. Smith, Verner and Smith (2013) also point to the fact that performance evaluations and candidate selections can be influenced by unconscious biases and thus be perceived as less fair from the minority group's perspective. Examples include managers/ boards who are less willing to hire individuals from a minority group and supervisors evaluating

performance based on unconscious biases around what productivity level, efforts and behaviours contribute to successfully performing a task.

Women managers and executives are exposed to a lesser extent to career-advancing opportunities and advocated for compared to men
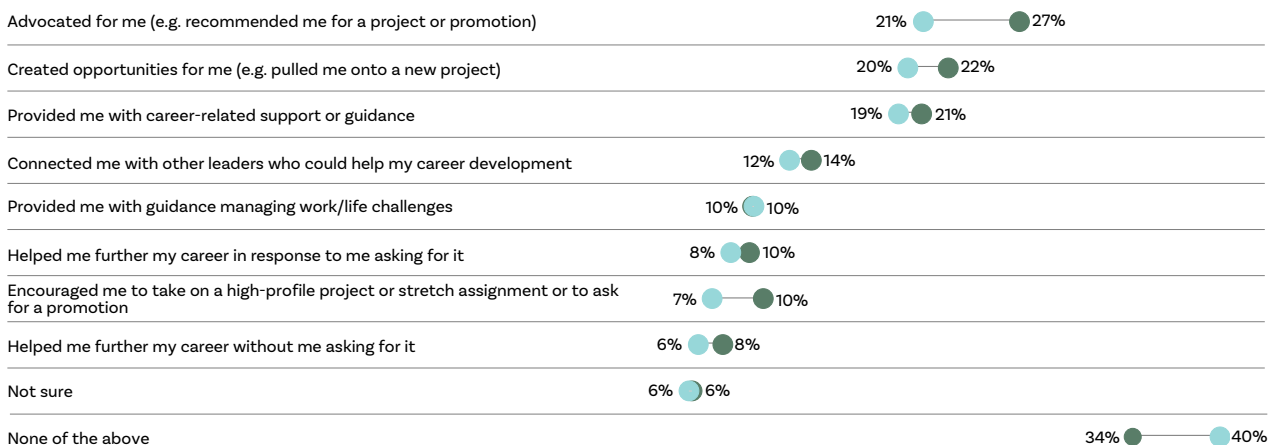
When transitioning from a non-managerial to a leadership role, being exposed to and receiving help from senior leaders in the organisation is helpful in further advancing one's career (OECD 2020b). The survey analysis finds that a higher share of senior

Exhibit 21

Employees receiving support from senior leaders to accelerate career advancement

● Men ● Women

% of managers who report what senior leaders in their organisation have done to help them (other than their direct managers)
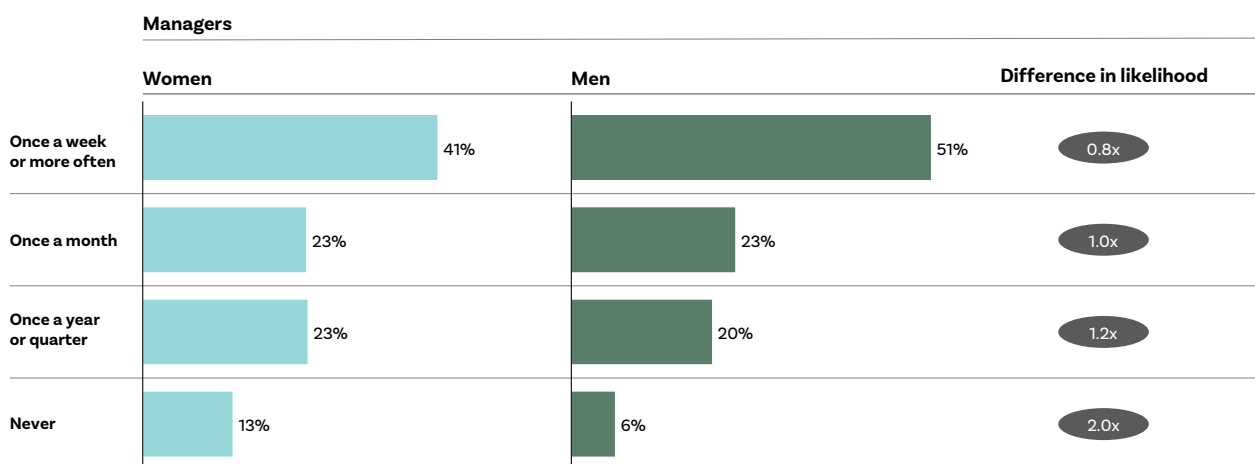
	Women	Men
Advocated for me (e.g. recommended me for a project or promotion)	21%	27%
Created opportunities for me (e.g. pulled me onto a new project)	20%	22%
Provided me with career-related support or guidance	19%	21%
Connected me with other leaders who could help my career development	12%	14%
Provided me with guidance managing work/life challenges	10%	10%
Helped me further my career in response to me asking for it	8%	10%
Encouraged me to take on a high-profile project or stretch assignment or to ask for a promotion	7%	10%
Helped me further my career without me asking for it	6%	8%
Not sure	6%	6%
None of the above	40%	34%

Note: sample sizes: n = 593 women managers and n = 780 men managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 22

Frequency of informal interactions with senior leaders in the organisation

Numbers are calculated as a % share of column total (i.e., by gender and role)

Managers

	Women	Men	Difference in likelihood
Once a week or more often	41%	51%	0.8x
Once a month	23%	23%	1.0x
Once a year or quarter	23%	20%	1.2x
Never	13%	6%	2.0x

Note: Sample sizes: N = 506 women managers, N = 1,147 women non-managers, N = 640 men managers, and N = 1,244 men non-managers
Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

leaders takes effective actions to help men managers and executives progress in their careers compared to women at the same seniority level. A statistically significant lower share of women is being directly recommended for new projects or promotions (i.e., 21 per cent of women managers versus 27 per cent of men managers) and has opportunities created for women by more senior leaders (20 per cent of women managers versus 22 per cent of men managers) (see Exhibit 21). In addition, when asked to what extent employees feel supported by their managers, a lower share of women report being supported by their direct managers. Especially at the executive level, the perceived level of support received significantly decreases for women. 81 per cent of men in executive positions strongly or somewhat feel supported by their manager, and only 59 per cent of women executives report the same. Even among managers, 80 per cent of males strongly or somewhat feel supported by their manager, while only 74 per cent of women do.

The Career Choice Survey also reveals that women are less likely to interact informally with senior leaders in their organisation, especially at the manager level (see Exhibit 22). 50 per cent of men

managers have very frequent informal interactions with senior leaders in their organisation (e.g., once a week or more often), whereas only 41 per cent of women managers have the same frequency of informal interaction. Correspondingly, a significantly larger share of women managers never has informal inactions with senior leaders compared to men (13 per cent vs 6 per cent). This suggest that the professional network of women at the manager level is less strong and connected to the executive layers of organisations compared to men, which puts them at a relative disadvantage when it comes to leveraging their network for career advancement.

Consistent with the survey findings, von Essen and Smith (forthcoming) have studied how the size of professional networks and interactions affect men and women's chances of being appointed to supervisory boards and how effects differ by gender. The study shows that between the period 1995 to 2011, men did not only have an advantage in the number of connections, but their networks also counted with more connections to large and listed firms. These findings are particularly strong when looking at first-time promotions into supervisory boards (ibid.).

'Women should lower the expectations for themselves in terms of what they need to deliver both in the workplace and at home – they are setting the bar too high. This is society's biggest Achilles' heel for increasing the number of female leaders.'

— Woman in managerial role with children

'If we want to create gender equality, we have to change how we view parental leave. Some men view ten weeks of leave as a vacation. It's hard work, and it's hard to return to your job while juggling sick children and limited sleep. I see my male peers with male bosses having a hard time getting parental leave. The recent increase in earmarked leave for fathers is a step in the right direction, because this needs to change'

— Woman in non-managerial role with children

Women's career advancement is impacted to a greater extent by parental leaves and household and caregiving responsibilities compared to men

In today's modern society, women typically still bear a heavier burden of household work and caregiving responsibilities (Iversen, Rosenbluth and Skorge 2020). This is consistent with our survey findings, suggesting that women rarely have a partner with full responsibility for the household work regardless of their level of seniority (only 4 to 10 per cent of women through seniority levels reported that their partner is fully responsible for household work) (Exhibit 23). In contrast, 19 per cent of men managers have a partner responsible for most or all household work, and that share increases to 27 per cent for men at the executive level. Top-end jobs are typically unregulated in terms of working hours and wages, and when employers recruit workers for such jobs, candidates that are available for around-the-clock work are typically

valued higher by companies (Iversen, Rosenbluth and Skorge 2020). Naturally, this puts women at a disadvantage in terms of working hours available and likely delay promotions. This puts additional pressure on women to signal job commitment to overcome unconscious biases around women not being interested in stretch assignments because of potential conflicting obligations outside work.

Household duties are also not equally distributed across genders and seniority levels. At the non-managerial level, 43 per cent of women are mostly or fully responsible for household work – for men at the same level the share is 24 per cent. The relative differences increase at the managerial level, where women are more than three times more likely to be the partner that is mostly or fully responsible for household duties compared to men. This means women in non-executive jobs also face an additional burden when signalling flexibility and job commitment.

Exhibit 23

Split of household work responsibility across roles and gender

Women are typically mainly responsible for household tasks, and compared to men, women rarely have partners with full responsibility of household work

■ My partner or someone else is responsible for all or most   □ I share responsibilities equally with a partner   ■ I am responsible for all or most

% of employees who report who has the main responsibility when it comes to household work[1]

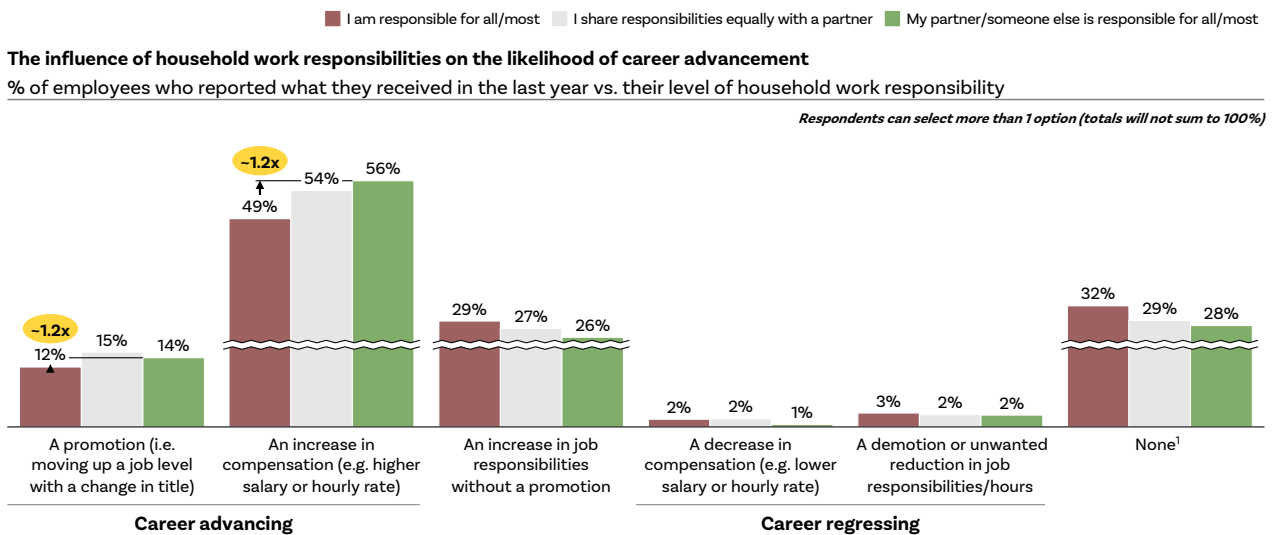| Non-manager		Manager		Executive	
Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
15%	4%	19%	6%	27%	10%
61%	53%	68%	55%	62%	70%
24%	43%	12%	39%	11%	20%
+19 p.p.		+27 p.p.		-17 p.p.	
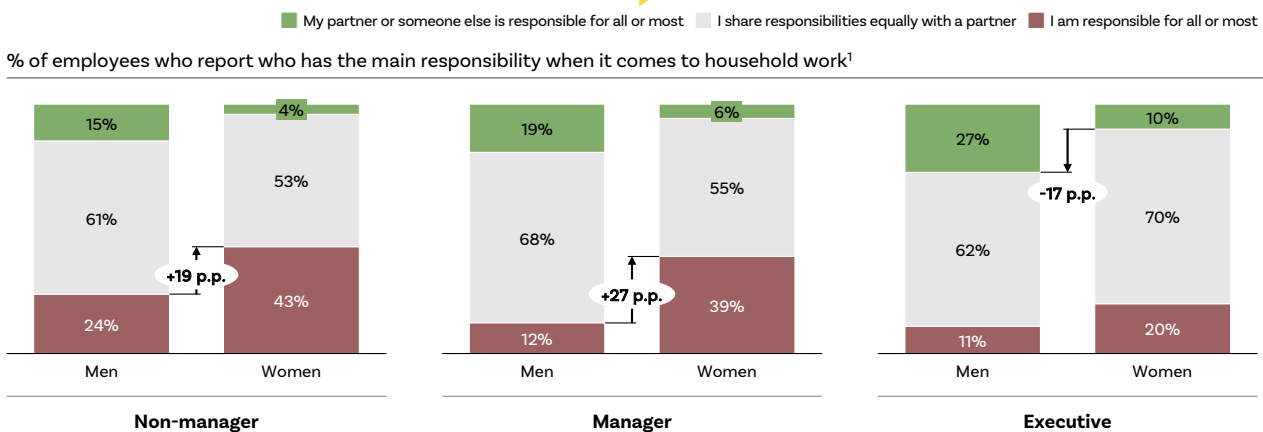
1.   E.g. housework, childcare, managing family's schedule, helping children with school
Note: sample sizes: n = 30 women executives, n = 487 women managers, n = 1,107 women non-managers, n = 55 men executives, n = 618 men managers and n = 1,175 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

'The long maternity leave in Denmark has a major impact on your career. You become more like a side-track, and you don't even know if your job will still be there. When I returned, my position was gone and I decided to quit.'

— **Woman in executive role with children**

Exhibit 24

Relationship between household work responsibilities and career progression

■ I am responsible for all/most   ☐ I share responsibilities equally with a partner   ■ My partner/someone else is responsible for all/most

The influence of household work responsibilities on the likelihood of career advancement
% of employees who reported what they received in the last year vs. their level of household work responsibility

Respondents can select more than 1 option (totals will not sum to 100%)

1. None of the options: 'A promotion', 'An increase in compensation', 'An increase in job responsibilities', 'A decrease in compensation', 'A demotion and/or unwanted reduction in job responsibilities/hours'
Note: sample sizes: n = 1,039 employees who are responsible for all/most household work, n = 2,080 employees who share responsibilities equally with a partner and n = 385 employees who have partners responsible for all/most household work (or have someone else responsible)

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 24 further shows that respondents with partners who are responsible for most or all household work saw higher promotion rates and increases in compensation. 49 per cent of the survey respondents who are responsible for most or all household work received an increase in compensation in the last year, that share increased to 56 per cent among those with partners who are responsible for most or all household work. Similarly, respondents who have a partner responsible for most/all household work were almost 1.2 times more likely to receive a promotion in the last year compared to respondents who are responsible themselves. Invisible work, especially related to household management and chores, represents a visible obstacle for women during the most fragile transition points in their careers.

Surveyed women are significantly more concerned that taking parental leave will negatively impact their career advancement compared to men

A recent study has shown that women in the most

egalitarian countries paradoxically feel most burned out, as they are performing a dual role with high expectations for both (Roskam et al. 2022). They found that the psychological distress of women increases upon becoming mothers as they have most duties related to childcare and housework compared to men, but are also expected to participate equally in the labour market.

Exhibit 25 reveals that even though most men and women felt supported when they took parental leave, 40 per cent of woman managers and 50 per cent of woman executives worried that it would hurt their careers, i.e., this concern increases the higher up in the hierarchy women are. In contrast, it appears that men rarely are concerned about how their careers would be impacted regardless of their level of seniority. According to a study, starting a family has a negative impact on women's prospects of having a leadership career (Kleven, Landais and Søgaard 2019; Holst-Jensen and Taasby 2018). Therefore, the design of parental leave schemes matters significantly in determining the division and share of time spent away from the labour force but also in forming the division of care responsibilities for the foreseeable future.

Exhibit 25

Employees' experience with taking parental leave from their organisation[1]

% of employees reporting what they felt during their parental leave, ranked by the highest % share of women respondents (respondents can select more than 1 option)

■ Positive experience   ■ Negative experience   ● Women   ● Men

	Non-managers		Managers		Executives	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Worried that it would hurt my career	31%	12%	40%	12%	50%	6%
Like I'm a burden to my team	12%	10%	7%	6%	20%	<1%
Judged	4%	3%	6%	2%	10%	6%
Supported	64%	68%	57%	68%	40%	78%
Like it's a normal thing and no big deal	49%	55%	41%	52%	20%	44%
Like it would not have any impact on my career	16%	28%	17%	33%	<1%	11%
Set up to succeed	5%	11%	5%	13%	<1%	11%

1. Excl. respondents reporting 'Other' (i.e. 4%, 3% and <1% of women non-managers, managers and executives, respectively, and 3%, 2% and <1% of men non-managers, managers, and executives, respectively)
Note: sample sizes: employees who have been on parental leave from their organisation, of which n = 32 women executives, n = 133 women managers, N = 255 women non-managers, n = 59 men executives, n = 174 men managers, and n = 290 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 26

Support from organisations to employees upon return from parental leave

% of employees who report each of the actions that their organisation took to support their return after parental leave

■ Women ■ Men

	None[1]	Not sure	Made a plan for my return	Proposed flexible working models	Proposed decrease in travel activity	Provided me with formal mentors	Provided me with a coach	Other
Women	55%	7%	26%	17%	3%	1%	1%	7%
Men	76%	8%	10%	5%	2%	1%	<1%	3%

Employees not receiving help from their organisation | **Employees receiving help from their organisation**
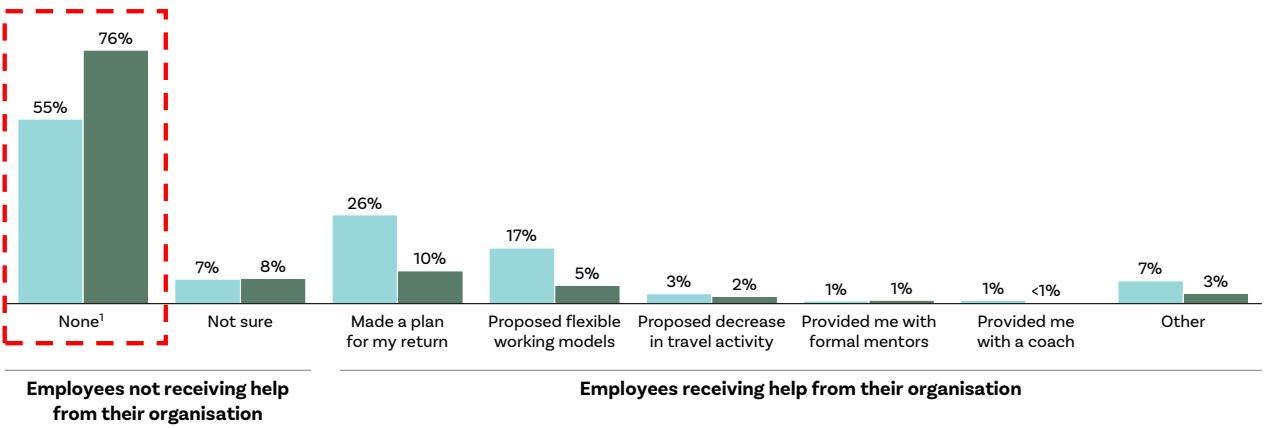
1. None among the listed actions 'Made a plan for my return', 'Proposed flexible working models', 'Proposed decrease in travel activity', 'Provided me with formal mentors', 'Provided me with a coach'
Note: sample sizes: employees who have been on parental leave from their organisation, of which n = 398 women and n = 482 men

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

'If someone has three children, it will take mothers out of the labour market for around 2.5–3 years. This means the women will be less skilled than their co-workers, and it is also very difficult to come back to work after all those years.'

— Man in executive role with children

‘What will make a real change – that is the paternity leave. In my job I was the first one, 12 years ago, to take paternity leave and now every father takes it. The earmarking of parental leave for the father will be a big thing’

— Man in executive role with children

Even though employees generally feel supported in taking parental leave, both men and women believe that organisations take little concrete actions to support them upon return. 76 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women believe no support was given as Exhibit 26 shows. This suggests that a large share of both women and men would benefit from formalised actions to support them upon return from parental leave and reduce the likelihood of being left behind in their career development.

Historically, implementation timing and differences in labour market and parental leave policies across the Nordics have contributed to the gender equality paradox

Nordic labour law has traditionally rested strongly on collective agreements rather than statutory provisions (Roseberry 2002). In Denmark, such collective labour law traditions have also impacted the development of statutory provisions. Collective agreements still take legal priority where equivalent provisions are provided (ibid.).

Among the Nordics, Denmark emerged early on as a leader in legislating on daycare provision – driven by an agenda of facilitating women's labour market participation and the dual-income family model. Despite its leadership in this policy area, Denmark was late relative to the other Nordic countries when it comes to taking active measures to advance equality in certain areas of work and family life (Gíslason and Eydal 2011). The right to joint parental leave and dedicated paternity leave was guaranteed late compared to Nordic peers although more extensive provisions can be found in Danish collective agreements, covering a large share of the working population.

Exhibit 27 shows the timing of important parental leave policy initiatives across the Nordics. Denmark

Exhibit 27

Overview of policy implementation timelines related to parental leave policies

Frontrunner

Policy theme	Policy initiative/law	Description	Introduction timeline				
			🇩🇰	🇫🇮	🇸🇪	🇳🇴	🇮🇸
Parental leave policies	**Joint parental leave**	Leave could be split between 2 parents of a child	1984	1980	1974	1987	1981
	Paternity leave	Earmarked leave for the father, immediately after childbirth	1984	1978	1980	1977	1998
	Fathers' quota	Earmarked share of the shared parental leave	1997 (abolished 2002)	2003	1995	1993	2001
	Extensions of fathers' earmarked paternity leave amount	8-11 weeks	2022 (11 weeks)	2013 (9 weeks)	2002 (8.7 weeks)	2009 (10 weeks)	2002 (8.7 weeks)
		12-16 weeks	…	2022 (*16 weeks)	2016 (14.3 weeks)	2013* (14 weeks, reversed in 2014, raised to 15 in 2018)	2003 (13 weeks)
		17-22 weeks	…	…	…	…	2020 (17.3 weeks)
							2021 (21.7 weeks)

Source: Løvslett Danbolt; Iselin. All about Business: Nordic women on boards and in leadership. Nordic Council of Ministers; Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat, 2016. Valdimarsdóttir, 2006.
"Nordic experiences with parental leave and its impact on equality between women and men"

Exhibit 28

Paid parental leave entitlements for fathers and mothers in 2020 across Nordic countries

Denmark has the lowest amount of parental leave reserved for fathers compared to other Nordic countries

Additional **9 weeks to be earmarked** for fathers from 2022 for a total of 11 weeks

■ Paid paternity leave ■ Paid parental leave reserved for fathers ■ Paid maternity leave ■ Paid parental leave available to mothers

	Total paid leave reserved for fathers, 2020			Total paid leave available to mothers, 2020			Ratio of full-rate equivalent leave[1]
	Length, weeks	Average payment rate,%	Full-rate equivalent, weeks	Length, weeks	Average payment rate,%	Full-rate equivalent, weeks	
Denmark	2	52% / N/A	1	18 / 32 / 50	52% / 52%	26	~25x
Finland	3 / 6 / 9	63% / 63%	6	18 / 144 / 161	75% / 19%	40	~7x
Iceland	17	N/A / 78%	14	9 / 17 / 26	78% / 78%	20	~2x
Norway	15	N/A / 96%	14	18 / 68 / 86	96% / 33%	40	~3x
Sweden	1 / 13 / 14	58% / 77%	11	13 / 43 / 56	77% / 57%	35	~3x
OECD average	2 / 7 / 9	N/A / N/A		18 / 32 / 50	N/A / N/A		
EU average	2 / 5 / 7	N/A / N/A		22 / 43 / 65	N/A / N/A		

1. Ratio calculated as mothers' full-rate equivalent available paid leave to fathers' reserved full-rate equivalent paid leave
Source: OECD

Paid maternity leave **to be reduced from 18 to 15 weeks** and available parental leave **to be reduced from 32 to 26 weeks** from 2022

introduced parental leave – which could be split between two parents – in 1984. Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce this policy in 1974 (Valdimarsdóttir 2006). Over the decades, the trend among Nordic countries has been moving towards an expansion of leave time and earmarked paternity leave; however, the earmarking of parental leave for fathers has not been implemented at the same time and to the same extent across Nordic countries.

Iceland, Norway and Sweden all introduced earmarked shares for fathers in the 1990s and have expanded them step by step since.[13] While fathers in Denmark were initially granted two weeks of leave immediately following birth in 1984, they were also given two additional earmarked paternity leave weeks in 1997. This right was, however, removed in 2002 and then reintroduced again. According to Borchorst (2006), the discussion on earmarking leave for fathers in the early 2000s solely revolved around the argument of individual choice, whereas structural aspects like the impact of such policy on attitudes were not brought into focus.

Earmarked parental leave for fathers varies significantly across Nordic countries, leading to differences in uptakes rates and disproportionately longer parental leave for mothers

Until recently, Denmark was an outlier in the Nordic context when it came to earmarking parental leave for fathers: there was, up to the 2022 reform, only two weeks of paternity leave reserved for fathers upon childbirth and none of the shared parental leave was earmarked for men. Following the reform, 11 weeks of earmarked parental leave will be guaranteed to each parent starting from 2022.

Rostgaard and Ejrnæs (2021) argue that this deviation from other Nordic countries can in part be explained by incremental policy change. The Danish approach towards equality throughout the years can more broadly be seen as emphasising equality of opportunity, evident in both the national goals set for gender equality as well as dominant discourses (Schulstok and Wikstrand 2020; Borchorst, Christensen, and Siim 2002). Such an

13 Except for Norway, where the earmarked leave for fathers was decreased from 14 to 10 weeks in 2014 but increased again from 10 to 15 weeks in 2018.

'The notion in society is that if a man says: 'I am taking 3 months of parental leave, it is celebrated and seen as a big deal'. But when a woman says I am taking 6 months, the question often is 'Why not longer?' There are very strong cultural mechanisms forcing women to take more than planned and social pressure among mothers is real…'

— **Woman in managerial role without children**

Exhibit 29

Fathers' share of parental leave in 2009 and 2019[1] %
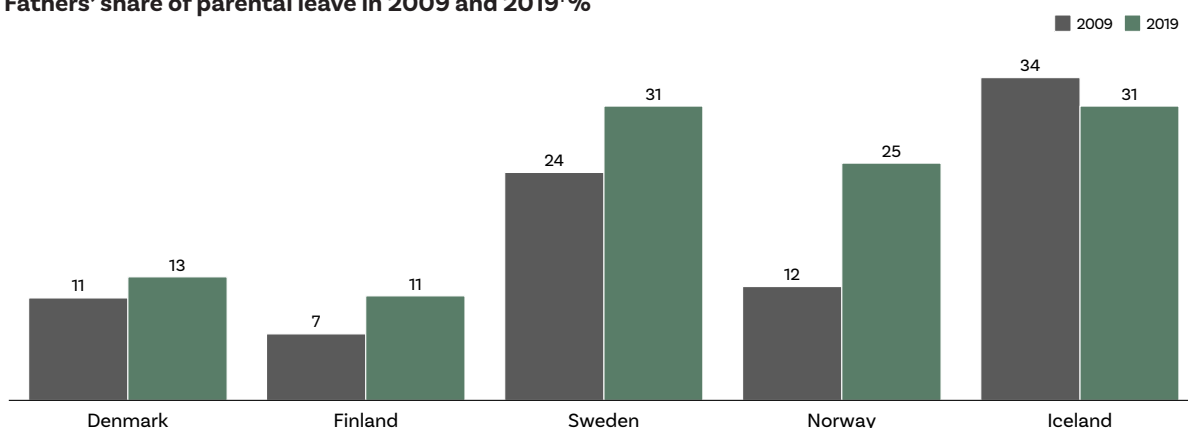
1. Share of benefit days taken by men. Per cent of benefit days taken by men excludes special maternity allowance and maternity allowance days before childbirth

approach has also translated into family policies that create the conditions for families to choose the most suitable arrangements rather than government intervention (Drange and Egeland 2014); however, they also reinforce implicitly traditional gender norms where the mother has the primary caregiving responsibilities as no designated parental leave for fathers was available until the reform in 2021 (Smith, Eriksson, and Smith 2021).

Based on the policy change in Denmark, from 2022 each parent will be entitled to two weeks after the child's birth, followed by 22 weeks allocated to each parent. Out of the individual parental leave of 22 weeks, nine weeks will be non-transferrable to the other partner and 13 weeks can be freely transferred. This change does not impact the total number of parental leave weeks available (48 in total); however, it aims to change the allocation between parents, leading to 11 weeks being earmarked for fathers. In comparison, all other Nordic countries had parental weeks specifically reserved for and only accessible to fathers. For example, in Sweden each parent is entitled to 240

days (around 34.28 weeks) of parental leave, out of which 90 days (around 13 weeks) are earmarked for each parent and the remaining 150 days can be transferred to the other parent.

While in Denmark collective agreements and company-specific policies can deviate from national legislation thresholds and exceed those, Exhibit 28 also shows that there are significant differences in pay rates. On a full-rate basis, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have the most balanced allocation of parental leave when it comes to the amount reserved for the father and amount accessible to mothers. Denmark ranks last as the ratio of full-rate equivalent parental leave weeks is 26:1 for women. For the remaining Nordic countries, this split is significantly more balanced at around two to three times and Finland at seven times. This distribution inevitably strengthens societal expectations of mothers being seen as primary caretakers and being expected to be on parental leave significantly longer than fathers.

Collective agreements and individual employer policies can go beyond the national policy and

Exhibit 30

Paid leave entitlements of working parents to care for sick children

	Paid leave entitlement for working parents with sick child(ren)	Paid leave conditions per child per year, 2020		
		Length, days	Avg. payment rate, %	Eligibility criteria
Denmark	?	←— Depending on collective agreements —→		
Iceland	?	←— Depending on collective agreements —→		
Sweden	✓	120[2]	77.6% (up to a maximum amount)	Children under age 12[3]
Norway	✓	10-20[1]	100% (up to a maximum amount)	Children under age 12
Finland	✓	4 per child sickness episode[4]	*Depending on collective agreements*	Children under age 10

1. 10 days per child per year when the parent has 1-2 children under the age of 12, 15 days per child per year when the parent has more than 2 children under the age of 12 and 20 days for a single parent
2. 60 days may be used in the event the regular caregiver falls ill
3. Or under 15 years old in special circumstances
4. Renewable without a limit

Source: OECD 2020a; Table PF2.3 "Additional leave entitlements of working parents"

parents can have different incentives on how to split the available parental leave depending on the financial conditions (full or partial salary) offered by their respective employers. Hence, in instances where mothers are offered a significantly longer period of fully paid parental leave compared to fathers, the household is less incentivised to have the father take a greater share of the combined parental leave. Based on the surveyed organisations, there are significant differences in the number of fully paid parental leave weeks offered to mothers and fathers. The variance ranges between 1.5 to 3.5 times more weeks of fully paid leave for mothers compared to fathers and significant differences in the number of fully paid maternity leave weeks, ranging between 14 weeks (legal minimum) to 26 weeks.

The design of the leave system also affects the realised uptake of parental leave (EIGE, 2021). Research on uptake patterns shows that earmarking leave for fathers has a strong impact on gender equality in terms of parental leave uptake (Rostgaard

and Ejrnæs 2021). Among the Nordics, the varying degree of flexibility in parental leave schemes is also evident in the uptake patterns. In comparison with other Nordic countries, fathers in Denmark and Finland take the smallest share of total available leave (Cederström 2019).

Exhibit 29 illustrates that fathers in Denmark took, on average, only 13 per cent in 2019 of the available parental leave benefit days compared to 31 per cent in Sweden and Iceland and 25 per cent in Norway. On average, Nordic countries with dedicated paternity leave reserved for fathers through earmarking, such as Sweden, Norway and Iceland, also have higher uptake rates.

Even though earmarked paternity leave is in place, Finland's uptake rate for fathers appears to be on par with Denmark. However, it is important to note that the shareable parental leave is longer, which implies that even though fathers take a comparable share of available benefit days, the absolute number of days taken in Finland is higher than in Denmark. Datta Gupta, Smith and Verner (2008) and
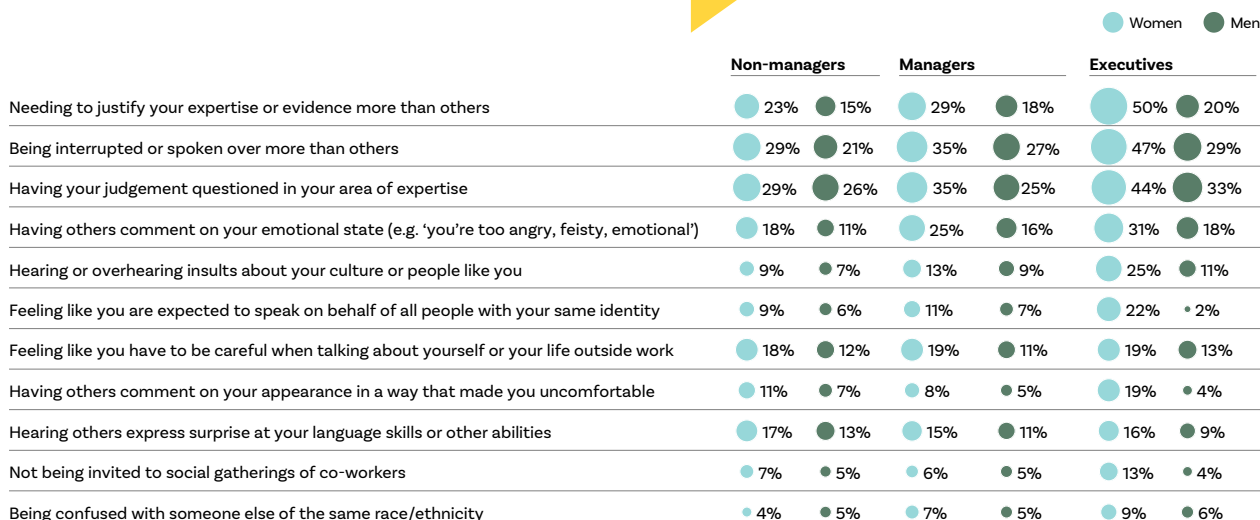
'With my partner we have discussed that probably I would go for a longer period on parental leave than him. This is also driven by financial incentives because we have a gap in our earnings and his employer gives him significantly shorter paid paternity leave'

— Woman in non-managerial role without children

Exhibit 31

Employees who have experienced microaggressions during the normal course of business across roles

Women leaders are more likely to face microaggressions compared to their men counterparts

● Women ● Men

	Non-managers		Managers		Executives	
Needing to justify your expertise or evidence more than others	23%	15%	29%	18%	50%	20%
Being interrupted or spoken over more than others	29%	21%	35%	27%	47%	29%
Having your judgement questioned in your area of expertise	29%	26%	35%	25%	44%	33%
Having others comment on your emotional state (e.g. 'you're too angry, feisty, emotional')	18%	11%	25%	16%	31%	18%
Hearing or overhearing insults about your culture or people like you	9%	7%	13%	9%	25%	11%
Feeling like you are expected to speak on behalf of all people with your same identity	9%	6%	11%	7%	22%	2%
Feeling like you have to be careful when talking about yourself or your life outside work	18%	12%	19%	11%	19%	13%
Having others comment on your appearance in a way that made you uncomfortable	11%	7%	8%	5%	19%	4%
Hearing others express surprise at your language skills or other abilities	17%	13%	15%	11%	16%	9%
Not being invited to social gatherings of co-workers	7%	5%	6%	5%	13%	4%
Being confused with someone else of the same race/ethnicity	4%	5%	7%	5%	9%	6%

Note: sample sizes: n = 33 women executives, n = 491 women managers, n = 1,121 women non-managers, n = 55 men executives, n = 625 men managers and n = 1,195 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Kleven, Landais and Søgaard (2019) also point out differences in the family-related policies across the Nordics, leading to different patterns of fathers' uptake of parental leave.

Mothers are more likely to stay home and care for sick children when no formalised policy is in place for paid leave entitlements due to child sickness

Children, particularly those in childcare, often require care due to sickness; therefore, parents need stay home and occasionally be away from work (Nordic Council of Ministers 2019). Across Nordic countries, parents have the right to stay home to care for their sick children. However, whether parents are entitled to get paid while they are on leave varies across countries. In contrast to most Nordic countries, Denmark and Iceland do not have legislation that entitles working parents to get paid during child sickness leave. This is regulated through sector-specific collective agreements, and in Denmark, the duration a parent can stay home is typically one to two days (Nordic Council of Ministers 2019; OECD 2020a). In Sweden, Norway and Finland, legislation requires that parents with sick children under the age of 10 or 12 get paid during their leave. The duration and payment conditions vary across countries, with Norway and Sweden having fixed payment rates up to a maximum amount (payment rates of 100.0 per cent and 77.6 per cent of earnings, respectively), whereas collective agreements determine payment rates in Finland.

The differences in conditions imply that, for example, in Denmark, households are often incentivised to have the partner with the lowest salary stay home to care for the child to minimise the joint financial impact on the family economy. Based on the gender wage gap, men earn on average higher gross hourly earnings – 14 per cent higher than those of women in Denmark (Eurostat 2020a).[14] The differences in policies across Nordics and the extent to which policies are put in place to compensate parents staying at home due to child sickness can be a contributing factor to reinforcing established gender norms. Women are more likely to stay at home and care for children in situations where women earn the lower share of income in the household and where no policy is in place that stipulates the allowed number of days and payment conditions.

2.4 Retain

In the stage 'Retain', women fully transition and settle into managerial and executive roles. We examine women's day-to-day experiences as the job

14 The equivalent unadjusted gender pay gap in 2020 is 13 per cent for Norway, 13 per cent for Iceland, 11 per cent for Sweden and 17 per cent in Finland. The indicators used are 'SDG_05_20' and 'EARN_GR_GPGR2' and are defined as unadjusted as it gives an overall picture of gender inequality in terms of pay and goes beyond the concept of equal pay for equal work. All employees in firms with more than 10 employees are covered in the metric.

changes. We look into what efforts are being made by leaders to support and retain women in those roles. In addition, we examine to what extent DE&I efforts are prioritised, promoted and committed to by organisations, and to what extent such efforts are formally recognised and rewarded.

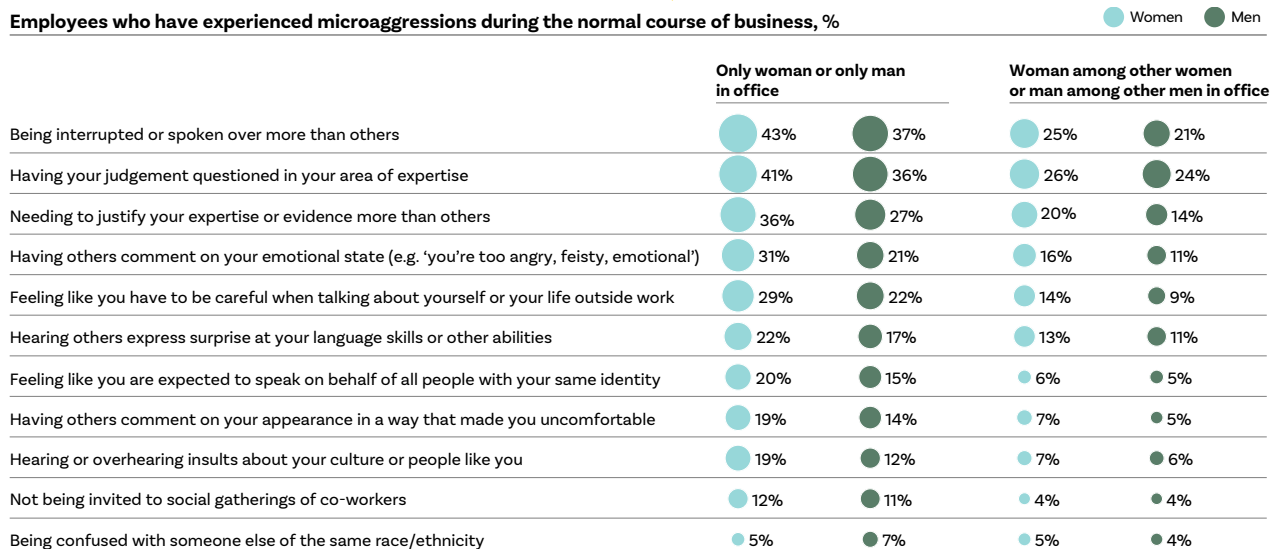## Women's day-to-day job becomes more difficult when they transition to managerial and executive roles

The survey results show that as women transition to management roles, their day-to-day experiences on the job become more difficult. Women with managerial responsibilities are much more likely to face microaggressions compared to their men counterparts (Exhibit 31). These microaggressions range from having others comment on the emotional state (e.g., 'you're too angry, feisty, emotional'), being interrupted more often than others and having one's judgment questioned in their area of expertise more than others. Men face the same microaggressions but at a significantly lower rate, and it appears that the share of men experiencing those does not change regardless of seniority levels. For women, the trend worsens across all types of microaggressions as they climb up the career ladder. In general, women

in non-managerial roles experience microaggressions to a lesser extent than women managers, which in turn have less of these experiences compared to women executives.

Compared to women in non-managerial positions, women at the executive level are approximately 2.3 times more likely to be the only woman in the room. The disproportionately higher share of men at the top means that executive women are often the only women in their immediate peer group. This creates a higher degree of visibility for them but also potentially triggers a stronger feeling of loneliness. Research shows that the 'onliness' phenomenon often leads to even worse experiences in the workplace regardless of gender. While it can enforce behaviour where employees hold back more in terms of expressing themselves, it also increases the risk of experiencing differential treatment (McKinsey 2019a). Even though women are more likely to face microaggressions in the workplace compared to men, the survey also provides evidence that the odds are higher when employees are the only ones of their gender in a group – regardless of whether they are a man or a woman (Exhibit 32). These findings have significant implications for how organisations think about the composition of teams at the workplace.

Exhibit 32

The influence of being the only of your gender in office on the experiences with facing microaggressions

Women are more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace than men, but being the only woman is an even worse experience

Employees who have experienced microaggressions during the normal course of business, %   ● Women ● Men

	Only woman or only man in office		Woman among other women or man among other men in office	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Being interrupted or spoken over more than others	43%	37%	25%	21%
Having your judgement questioned in your area of expertise	41%	36%	26%	24%
Needing to justify your expertise or evidence more than others	36%	27%	20%	14%
Having others comment on your emotional state (e.g. 'you're too angry, feisty, emotional')	31%	21%	16%	11%
Feeling like you have to be careful when talking about yourself or your life outside work	29%	22%	14%	9%
Hearing others express surprise at your language skills or other abilities	22%	17%	13%	11%
Feeling like you are expected to speak on behalf of all people with your same identity	20%	15%	6%	5%
Having others comment on your appearance in a way that made you uncomfortable	19%	14%	7%	5%
Hearing or overhearing insults about your culture or people like you	19%	12%	7%	6%
Not being invited to social gatherings of co-workers	12%	11%	4%	4%
Being confused with someone else of the same race/ethnicity	5%	7%	5%	4%

1. Excl. employees who responded that they 'Sometimes' are the only one of their gender in the room at the office or that they are 'Not sure' how often this is the case (n = 377 women and n = 392 men)
Note: sample sizes: n = 862 women and n = 1,295 men among other women/men in office, and n = 405 women and n = 188 men who are the only men/women in office)
Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 33

Employees reporting how their direct manager supports them

% of employees with women vs. men direct manager

■ Women managers ■ Men managers

(xx) P.p. difference between employees with a woman and a man as manager

Checked in on my overall well-being	50% / 48%	+2
Invited me to team bonding events	37% / 33%	+4
Worked with me to ensure my workload was manageble	32% / 29%	+3
Promoted an environment where people can discuss challenging topics	31% / 31%	<+1
Helped me navigate work/life challenges	28% / 23%	+4
Provided emotional support for me	18% / 12%	+6
Helped me take actions to prevent or manage burnout	16% / 14%	+2
None of the above	8% / 11%	-3

Note: sample sizes: n = 1,442 employees with a woman direct manager and n = 3,047 with a man direct manager

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Women are setting new standards for leadership, but their additional efforts are not formally recognised

Studies have shown that compassionate leaders foster more loyalty and engagement in their teams, ultimately leading to better team performance (McKinsey 2020a and 2021c). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, further increased the pressure on managers to provide emotional support to their teams. The survey shows that employees with women managers are more likely to report that their manager is consistently doing more to promote the well-being of their teams compared to employees with men managers (Exhibit 33). Examples include providing emotional support, helping navigate work-life balance, and inviting employees to social events. While women are setting a new standard for leadership, they also carry a heavier emotional workload compared to men managers in supporting employees.

Women at the top also consistently do more to support women in the workplace, especially by

Exhibit 34

How managers and executives support women in the workplace

● Men ● Women

	Managers supporting women at the workplace, % share of managers	Executives supporting women at the workplace, % share of executives
I advocate for new opportunities for women	25% — 31%	44% — 69%
If I see discrimination against women, I actively work to confront it	42% — 49%	61% 64%
I actively listen to the personal stories of women about bias and mistreatment	38% — 45%	46% — 61%
I publicly acknowledge or give credit to women for their ideas and work	45% 46%	54% — 61%
I educate myself (e.g., read books, attend events) about the experiences of women	15% — 30%	25% — 58%
I mentor or sponsor one or more women	21% — 25%	42% — 56%
I take a public stand to support gender equality	33% — 34%	44% — 51%
I actively solicit the perspectives of women when making decisions	19% — 24%	25% — 31%
None of the above	11% 11%	3% 4%

Note: sample sizes: n = 36 women executives, n = 593 women managers, n = 72 executives and n = 780 men managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 35

Employees' perception of their organisation's prioritisation of DE&I and execution on DE&I commitments

Men are more likely to perceive that their organisation prioritises DE&I and follows through with their commitments to promote DE&I compared to women

Perceived organisational _prioritization_ of DE&I

% share of employees who report how much DE&I is a priority to their organisation
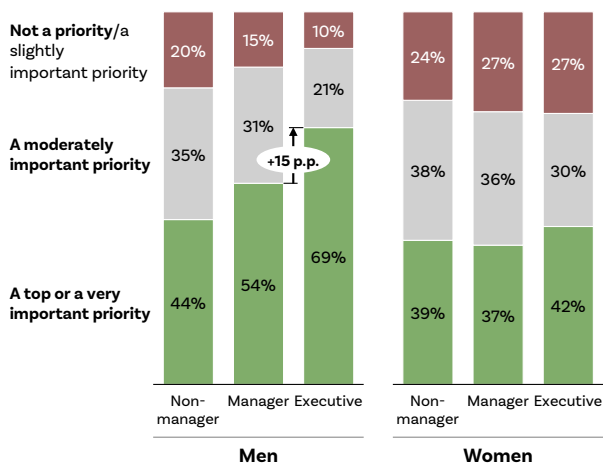
Perceived _execution_ on DE&I commitments in the organisation

% share of employees who report to what extent their organisation has followed through on commitments to increase focus on DE&I
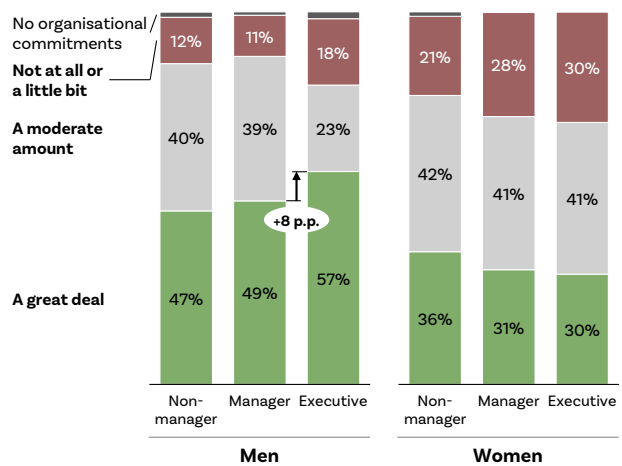
Note: perceived organisational prioritization of DE&I sample sizes: n = 33 women executives, n = 530 women managers, n = 1,257 women non-managers, n = 61 men executives, n = 695 men managers and n = 1,355 men non-managers. Perceived execution on DE&I commitments in the organisation sample sizes: n = 27 women executives, n = 416 women managers, n = 834 women non-managers, n = 56 men executives, n = 576 men managers and n = 860 men non-managers.

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

educating themselves about the experiences of women, mentoring and sponsoring women in less senior roles (Exhibit 34). Even though men outnumber women in management positions three to one, only one in two (45 out of 100 employees) report that their sponsors are mostly or all men. This suggests that senior women leaders are disproportionately more involved in sponsoring and mentoring as their load is 1.5 times higher than senior men leaders.

A disconnect can be observed between men and women in the perceived prioritisation and execution of DE&I commitments. Compared to women executives, men executives are approximately 1.6 times more likely to believe that DE&I is a very high or top priority and around two times more likely to believe that their organisation followed through on DE&I commitments to a great deal (Exhibit 35). The perception among men that DE&I efforts are highly prioritised within organisations increases in seniority

level, whereas for women the share remains roughly constant across seniority levels.

While women leaders are more sceptical of their organisation's level of commitment to DE&I, both genders predominately believe their organisations do more to raise awareness around DE&I rather than take concrete actions to improve DE&I, such as investing and allocating more resources, setting goals, holding leaders accountable for those goals and providing training on biases/inclusion (Exhibit 36). A consistent pattern across is that a larger share of managers and executives believe that DE&I efforts are addressed through concrete resource allocation, goals, accountability and trainings compared to non-managers across different types of initiatives.

It appears that women executives are more actively involved in promoting DE&I in their organisations. However, they are approximately 1.3 times more likely to spend time promoting DE&I without it being

a formal part of their job responsibilities compared to men executives. Both men and women leaders predominately experience that their work to promote DE&I is not recognised formally through, e.g., performance reviews (Exhibit 37). This means that critical work around employee well-being and DE&I

done by leaders generally is overlooked. However, women leaders are investing a disproportionate amount of time compared to men, meaning a greater share of their contribution to their organisation is undervalued.

Exhibit 36

Employees' perception of organisational efforts toward promoting and improving DE&I

Employees generally perceive that their organisations talk more about DE&I importance rather than taking concrete actions to improve DE&I

% of employees who reported what their organisation has done in the last year related to DE&I

Non-manager ▪ Manager ▪ Executive

Respondents can select more than 1 option (totals will not sum to 100%)

	Awareness	Resource allocation		Goals and accountability		Training	
	Senior leaders spoke about the importance of DE&I	The organisation invested more resources to promote DE&I	The organisation actively supported employee resource groups focused on DE&I	The organisation took concrete steps to meet DE&I goals[1]	Leaders were held accountable for meeting goals or promoting DE&I	All employees received training related to combating bias	All employees received training aimed at fostering DE&I	None[2]
Women (Non-manager / Manager / Executive)	45 / 61 / 75	18 / 20 / 47	15 / 15 / 44	16 / 18 / 33	9 / 14 / 28	12 / 17 / 14	12 / 17 / 14	22 / 14 / 8
Men (Non-manager / Manager / Executive)	46 / 64 / 78	23 / 30 / 43	17 / 22 / 38	17 / 27 / 36	11 / 20 / 29	15 / 22 / 25	13 / 17 / 22	24 / 13 / 4

Most deployed by organisations

1. E.g. requiring diverse slates in hiring or promotions
2. None of the efforts listed in the overview here
Note: sample sizes: n = 36 women executives, n = 593 women managers, n = 1,447 women non-managers, n = 72 men executives, n = 780 men managers and n = 1,590 men non-managers

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

Exhibit 37

The perceived extent of formal recognition of DE&I-related work

Between ~27-63% of employees either don't know how DE&I efforts are recognised or believe that there is no formal recognition of DE&I efforts

% of employees who report to what extent the work they do to promote DE&I is formally recognized[1], by gender and role[2]

Numbers are calculated as a % share of column total

	Men			Women		
	Executives	Managers	Non-managers	Executives	Managers	Non-managers
A great deal	32%	11%	8%	34%	10%	9%
Some	41%	39%	40%	28%	39%	28%
Not at all or don't know	27%	50%	52%	38%	51%	63%
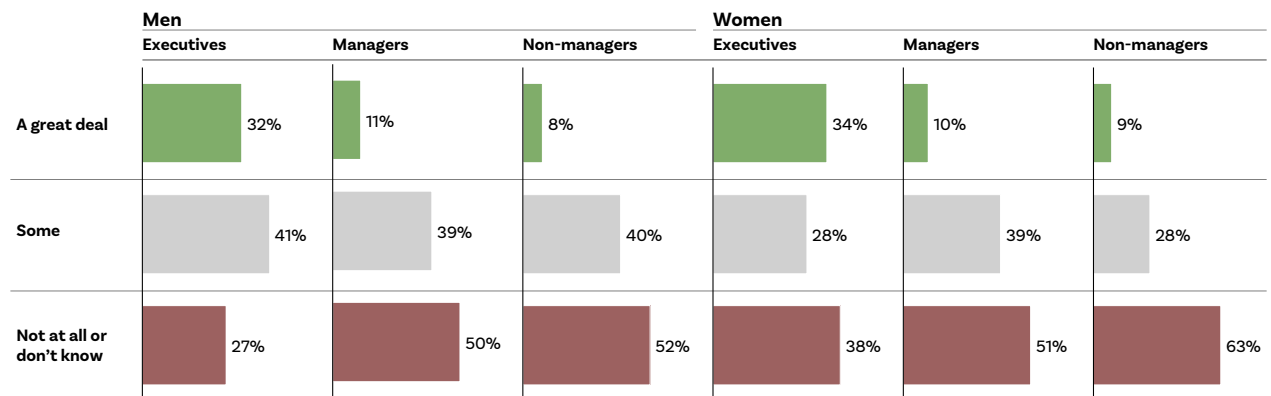
1. E.g. in performance reviews
Note: sample sizes: n = 27 women executives, n= 416 women managers, n = 834 women non-managers, n = 56 men executives, n = 567 men managers and n = 860 men non-managers
2. Not answered by employees who responded that 'Promoting gender DE&I is not a part of my formal job responsibilities, and I don't

Source: Career Choice Survey 2022

3. Considerations for building a more balanced representation of women in leadership roles

The analyses so far have established an array of factors impacting the progression of women in the workplace both at the i) macro-level, i.e., social norms and gender preferences, parental leave, and paid leave entitlements, and at ii) the micro-level, i.e., individual behaviours and biases, and career advancing processes. While the obstacles are interrelated and often manifest themselves in multiple moments of women's career progression, we synthesise the obstacles leading to the gender paradox across five major themes in Table 2.

Table 2

Obstacle themes behind the Nordic equality gender paradox

Themes				
1. Education: The gender imbalance exists already at the beginning of the talent pipeline	**2. Unpaid work and caregiving:** Women have to a higher degree caregiving responsibilities and unpaid work compared to men	**3. Career support on the way to the top:** Women receive career advancement support to a lesser extent than men	**4. Workplace inclusiveness:** Organisations are still not inclusive enough towards women, especially at the top of the career ladder	**5. Workplace DE&I commitment:** Actions focusing on DE&I are not sufficiently formalised in organisations
Synthesis of findings by theme				
• The master's degrees that produce the most significant share of managers are dominated by men (business, management and economics, technical sciences, and science) • A relatively higher share of women enters the public sector compared to men	• Women generally have a larger share of household work responsibility across all levels of seniority • Women's careers are disrupted to a greater extent due to longer parental leaves taken by mothers • Denmark appears to have relatively more pronounced traditional gender norms compared to other countries (e.g., attitudes towards working mothers, fair split of parental leave between parents, etc.) • Historically, parental leave and caregiving policies combined with gender attitudes and cultural norms have been further reinforcing traditional gender roles (e.g., limited parental leave earmarked for fathers in Denmark, unavailable legislation on paid entitlements for working parents reserved for care after sick children)	• Woman managers are presented with career-advancing opportunities and receive mentorship/sponsorship to a lesser extent than men • Woman managers also have less frequent informal interactions with senior leaders relative to men and hence less extensive networks at work • Women's careers are not prioritised to the same extent as their partner's career	• Women in leadership positions face more microaggressions (e.g., having their expertise questioned, being interrupted, etc.) compared to men • Women are also more likely to experience microaggressions relative to men, especially if a woman is the 'only' one in a group • Women perceive the opportunity for advancement/promotions as less fair and objective in today's career ladder design compared to men, amplified as women climb the career	• DE&I efforts are not sufficiently recognised formally, and women spend more time on promoting DE&I without it being a formal part of the job compared to men • A significant share of employees is unaware whether DE&I efforts are formally recognised • Accountability on DE&I commitments is currently not sufficient as employees generally do not believe leaders are held accountable for meeting DE&I goals • A relatively higher share of women executives believe DE&I is a low priority and that organisations do not sufficiently follow through on DE&I commitments relative to men executives

Career lifecycle step at which obstacle occurs

Inspire · **Attract and Promote** · **Attract and Promote** · **Promote and Retain** · **Retain**

The considerations are structured to tackle each of the obstacle themes separately. However, as the barriers are intertwined, the effect of one initiative might help alleviate a barrier across several critical steps of the career lifecycle. Governments play a key role in promoting change through policies but also by driving awareness in society. Similarly, business leaders are well-positioned to take action at the company level and drive change in culture and practices. While standalone actions are effective, the biggest impact can be unlocked only through coordinated efforts across businesses and public institutions.

Consideration 1 - Inspire the next generation through celebration of women role models and talent development programmes at the early education stage

Even as women graduate in higher numbers than men there are still continued imbalances across degrees, leading to an underrepresentation of women in degrees (e.g., STEM-related fields) that are more conducive to leadership careers. It is known that gender-stereotyped preferences start forming from a very young age, and studies suggest that gendered notions of abilities and roles influence children's interests early on (Bian, Leslie and Cimpian 2017, Brenøe and Zölitz 2020). Given that ideas and interests are shaped at such an early stage, they bear a considerable influence on decisions regarding future educational choices and career paths. Interventions challenging stereotypes as well as targeting self-efficacy can be helpful in strengthening interest in educational and professional areas where a gender gap exists.

We investigate two sets of considerations to help inspire the young generation and spark their interest into fields that appear to lead to managerial and executive career paths. Firstly, we consider 'role models' as important agents of change and inspiration for women to see the path ahead and see themselves in leadership careers. Secondly, we investigate what initiatives could help boost the interest of girls within STEM as these are the degrees where the gender gap remains still significant. It is reassuring that the underlying trends of increasing share of women in STEM degrees and other main leadership-producing degrees are already helping narrow the gender gap.

Promote an environment where girls and women can identify with successful role models to challenge stereotypes

While gender stereotypes take significant time to change, as shown in sub-chapter 2.2, they evolve over time. An effective way to break stereotypes is to build a critical mass of examples that do not fit the established stereotypical perceptions.

Role models are effective in countering stereotypical beliefs about women and encouraging leadership aspirations among women. Current findings suggest that exposure to women leaders effectively reduces stereotypical beliefs while activating positive beliefs about women as leaders (Dasgupta and Asgari, 2004). The impact of role models on girls' attitudes, self-efficacy and decisions to pursue a career in fields characterised by a persisting gender gap has been documented across numerous studies (e.g., Ashby Plant et al. 2009; Zawistowska 2017; Stout et al. 2011). In addition, it is important to celebrate role models and ensure that successes and achievements are shared and communicated across the organisation to ensure wider reach and visibility for more junior colleagues.

Reversing the gender gap in STEM through campaigns and talent development programmes in the early stages of the education

- **Initiatives and programmes promoting STEM** can positively change young students' attitudes and identification with STEM (Guenaga et al. 2022; González-Pérez, Mateos de Cabo and Sáinz 2020; Microsoft 2018; Ashby Plant et al. 2009; UNESCO 2017). The format of these initiatives ranges from group mentoring sessions and volunteers presenting at schools to virtual interactions.
- **Talent development training / initiative to recruit and develop talent:** Womengineer, a foundation in Sweden informs and inspires teenage girls to pursue an engineering career. Among their most important tools – 'Introduce a girl to engineering day,' where large corporations introduce what it's like to be an engineer at their company. In 2022 alone, almost 2,000 girls signed up and the foundation's operations were expanded to the US (for the first time).
- **Problem-solving events and competitions:** For example, Technovation Girls invites girls to solve real-life problems with technology by producing mobile app start-ups. More than 34,000 girls from over 100 countries have taken part in Technovation events.

Surveyed alumni indicate broadened interest and leadership skills development (Technovation 2021).

Consideration 2 - Promote a family-friendly workplace culture and challenge established gender roles in daily life by supporting a balanced split of household duties and caregiving responsibilities

Companies can support families with family-friendly workplace policies and initiatives

According to Heckman (2008) and UNICEF (n/d), the early years of a child's life have a lasting effect on its future since children's brains during this time develop at the fastest rate. Hence, working environments/employers should support parents such that they can provide the right care and nurture during especially the critical first years of children's life. From the Career Choice Survey results, we found that women are predominately the main caretakers after birth. We also found that their high degree of caregiving responsibilities in their households poses additional challenges when it comes to career progression (e.g., getting promoted, receiving an increase in compensation). It is therefore vital that companies promote a family-friendly culture to not only support new parents but also to retain talent. Table 3 summarises examples of initiatives that help promote a family-friendly workplace culture (UNICEF n/d; Costantini et al. 2021).

Companies and public institutions can incentivise a more balanced split in household work and caregiving responsibilities to level out the playing field for men and women

Spending significant time on unpaid work such as household activities and caregiving can put employees at a disadvantage since it reduces their

Table 3
Example initiatives to promote a family-friendly workplace culture

Initiative	Expected benefit (not exhaustive)
Guarantee that women are not discriminated against based on pregnancy, motherhood, or family responsibilities in relation to, e.g., employment conditions, wages or career opportunities	Overall improvement of DE&I in the workplace
Offer policies to support breastfeeding mothers including break allowances to express milk and provision of private rooms/facilities for expressing and storing milk	Increased flexibility for families and catering for parental needs
Offer flexible working policies/arrangements such as work-from-home policies and part-time work arrangements to both men and women	Increased flexibility for employees and enhanced time prioritisation
Establish a policy of "no meetings, no phone calls, no e-mails" within blocked evening hours to enable undisturbed time for parents with their children	Protected time for families, especially for those with evening work obligations
Appointment of colleagues/mentors responsible for keeping parents on parental leave informed about organisational issues/successes	Maintained feeling of inclusion and belonging to the workplace during longer leaves
Jointly develop plans with workers to support their transition back to work (before the actual leave happens)	Eased transition of new parents and clear pathway upon return
Provide coaching, motivational, and/or psychological support to new parents	Mental health support for new parents
Continuously monitor and collect data on all aspects of family-friendly policies to ensure protocols are followed and improved where possible	Improved reporting and greater commitment to DE&I at the workplace

flexibility and availability around work-related matters. The Career Choice Survey results show that women are predominately responsible for household and caregiving tasks – the same holds true for women at the top of the career ladder. Decision-makers across both the private and public sector can play a role in balancing the split of unpaid work. Companies can help incentivise a higher degree of outsourcing of unpaid work, especially household-related activities. The public sector can help raise awareness in promoting more gender-equal split of household duties and caregiving responsibilities.

Denmark made significant changes to the parental policy in 2021 by increasing the earmarked paternity leave. Based on evidence from other Nordic countries, this change would contribute to more equal division of care responsibilities within households, gender roles and attitudes, which are both strong factors explaining the gender paradox in leadership roles. Even though the parental leave policy reform is expected to foster women's advancement in leadership roles, companies can consider the design of their individual parental leave policies beyond national minimums. An even more balanced split of the parental leave within households can be achieved by equalising the number of fully paid parental leave weeks offered to mothers and fathers. Naturally, this will financially incentivise households to have fathers take a greater share of the combined parental leave. Research published by the Nordic Council of Ministers (2019) has even indicated that fathers who take longer paternity leave have a positive impact on how fathers see themselves as parents, the relation they have to their partners, and the relation they have to their work, including managers and co-workers. In addition, fathers who took parental leave were also more involved in household work, communicated better with their partners about the needs of their children and had a better understanding of their children and partners' daily lives.

As established earlier in sub-chapter 2.3, the lack of legislation around paid leave entitlements of working parents to care for sick children in Denmark might also contribute to reinforcing traditional gender norms where mothers are predominantly the ones staying at home. Companies can therefore also offer a fixed number of paid days, reserved for child sickness, to both parents and thereby incentivising a more balanced division of caregiving responsibilities within households.

Besides providing caregiving support to families, companies can also help reduce the need for spending time on time-intensive and routine tasks in the home, such as food preparation, clean-up, laundry and clothes care, ground/animal care, home maintenance, and purchasing goods/services. Initiatives to reduce time spent on such tasks include organisation-wide information sharing on outsourcing services, available hotline for emergency childcare support, but also financial compensation/support for families to outsource services.

Public institutions can also help incentivise a more balanced split of household and caregiving responsibilities between mothers and fathers. The EECE MenEngage Platform, a network initiated by the United Nations reproductive health and rights agency, points out that governments can work with school administrations and teachers to further challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Examples of such collaborations include positive fatherhood campaigns but also promoting educational programs that educates both boys and girls about the skills and knowledge required to executive household-related tasks.

Consideration 3 - Support talent on the way to the top through mentorship, sponsorship, leadership programmes and functional capability development

Mentorship and sponsorship programmes deliver great benefits for both workers and organisations if implemented correctly

The Career Choice Survey results and our interviews with women at Danish organisations show that women receive career advancement support to a lesser extent than men, especially at the manager level. For example, women managers are not being recommended for projects and promotions at the same rate as men, and women managers also have less frequent informal interactions with senior leaders. Organisations can increase career advancement support to women, especially through establishing mentorship and sponsorship programmes.

Mentorship programmes can be designed to achieve many different goals, including career growth development of the mentee, connecting the workforce across seniority levels, improving retention rates, developing leaders, and/or disseminating knowledge. When such programmes are implemented effectively, the effects impact both the individuals and the organisation overall.

A study examining the effectiveness of a mentoring programme found, that mentoring programmes boosted the minority representation at the management level by between 9 to 24 per cent (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). A workplace happiness study conducted by CNBC/SurveyMonkey found that workers with a mentor are more likely than those without to say their contributions are valued by their colleagues (89 versus 75 per cent) and state that they are well paid (79 versus 69 per cent).

Sponsorship programmes are like mentorship programs by design. However, a sponsor is more actively involved in providing and creating career-advancing opportunities for the sponsee, whereas a mentor has more of a guiding role for the mentee. Examples of how sponsors help with career progression include involving the sponsee in projects/work, advocating for the sponsee (e.g.,

recommending sponsee for a promotion/project), connecting the sponsee to other leaders who can help with career development, and/or encouraging the sponsee to take on a high-profile project/asking for a promotion. Both mentorship and sponsorship programmes share similar best practices to ensure successful implementation – ranging from clearly defining the scope and the expectations of the relationship and ensuring active engagement before, during and after meetings (see Exhibit 38).

Leadership programmes and capability development can help accelerate skill building and prepare future leaders for the demands of managerial and executive roles

The survey results established that women are exposed to fewer career advancement opportunities, are less connect with senior leaders and face additional obstacles in the form of disproportionately higher responsibilities with household duties and caregiving compared to men. The implications are that women's experience and skill accumulation at the job may be slower for women if they have less flexibility around the job or if they are exposed to high-impact projects/opportunities less frequently.

Exhibit 38

Example best practices of the mentoring relationship

Mentee responsible   Mentor responsible

Defining the scope of the relationship	Engaging in the relationship		
	Before sessions	**During sessions**	**After sessions**
Agree on the type of contact and the expected response time	Reflect on passions, interests and career objectives	Be willing to accept constructive feedback and criticism	Reflect on your discussion with your mentor and set a specific action plan to move forward
Decide on frequency, length and location of meetings	Identify and define professional development goals that are specific, measurable and attainable	Actively listen during the conversation, build on ideas and ask clarifying questions	Update your mentor on significant academic and professional achievements
Discuss the extent of confidentiality of the topics discussed	Prepare a combination of open and closed questions to get the most out of the session	Be transparent and willing to share your work-related experiences, challenges and goals	
Align the expectations for receiving/giving feedback of both mentee and mentor	Prepare adequately for the session by recalling previous discussions with mentee	Listen carefully to your mentee; ask questions and acknowledge frequently what mentee is saying	Respect mentee's choice to do what's right for their situation
Align the expectations of goals and outcomes for both mentee and mentor		Provide constructive feedback as a disinterested third party	Have an open door – welcome mentor's requests for help and provide assistance where possible
Discuss accountability for meeting goals defined		Share yourself fully while weighing different options with mentee and let them find the solution	Follow up with mentee on actions taken
Decide on evaluation criteria for success of the relationship			

Source: Forbes 2019 (https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryabbajay/2019/01/20/mentoring-matters-three-essential-element-of-success/?sh=2b86342045a9)

A case example:
The Master Mentor approach

The Master Mentor approach was developed and piloted by the School of Medicine at John Hopkins University in 2012 after the leaders discovered high attrition among especially women in junior faculty roles who reported feeling invisible and unsupported (Johnson, Smith, and Haythornthwaite 2020). In response, the Master Mentor approach was developed to increase the quality and frequency of mentorship relationships by making the mentor selection process highly competitive, including rewards and recognition for those selected. The approach follows three key steps:

1. The university nominates mentors from a pool of directors and managers who have a consistent track record of successful mentoring and actively seeks out the opinions of junior employees (e.g. what directors/ managers are the most generous/caring/ helpful, and who do you go to for advice?).

2. A committee selects mentors from the pool of selected directors/managers, and those mentors are consistently trained for six months in, e.g. skill-building workshops; this includes the participation of less tenured employees.

3. After the training is completed, the mentors are certified (which is noted in their personnel profiles), and they actively take on a greater share of the mentoring load.

The biggest lessons from the pilot were that 1) mentors selected need support, resources and incentives to make the programmes a high-priority activity, and 2) developing a culture of excellence in mentoring and a strong community of mentors requires engagement and participation of leaders throughout the organisation (Johns Hopkins University 2022; Johnson, Smith, and Haythornthwaite 2020).

Therefore, organisations can support talented employees at the workplace by supporting their career advancement through dedicated leadership programmes. Such programmes can be provided both internally, depending on the size of the organisation, through partnerships with specialised business institutions or externally through academic institutions (e.g., Harvard Business School Executive MBA, The Stanford Leadership Development Programme and IMD Executive education).

To reap the benefits from leadership development programmes requires commitment from both the participants and organisations. Such programmes can be viewed as a 'readying' process, where future leaders share experiences, learn from each other and internalise the requirements and skills needed to navigate complex leadership roles. A few guiding principles based on research (Vinnicombe, Moore and Anderson 2013; Eagly and Carli 2007; Thomson 2008) can help in the successful implementation and outcome of leadership training:

- **Principle 1:** Ensure that both management and participants take joint responsibility and embed such programmes fully into organisations.
- **Principle 2:** Establish a safe space for selected participants to work on their leadership development.
- **Principle 3:** Focus participants on leadership self-efficacy as it takes effort and time to envision own leadership value and areas of impact in the organisation.

An additional consideration relates to providing specific functional and capability training to employees who have not been on managerial or executive career paths. As the cohort analyses showed, there is a significant drop in women representation at the managerial level compared to non-managerial. Therefore, a viable lever to increase the women leadership talent pipeline at a faster pace is to attract existing women employees from non-managerial pathways to shift towards leadership career paths. This could be achieved through functional training courses aiming to equip women with the skills and tools required to successfully manage and lead teams within a specific function, such as Sales, Finance and Operations.

Consideration 4
Promote an inclusive workplace culture and design objective, transparent and fair promotion processes

The survey findings that women in leadership positions face significantly more microaggressions [15] and the career ladder is perceived as less fair and objective than for men. Therefore, companies in Denmark can strengthen inclusiveness by focusing on improving two areas: 1) women's personal experiences in the workplace, and 2) the transparency and fairness of career advancement (e.g., promotion processes, compensation increases/pay-outs).

Personal experiences in the workplace and how employees perceive their organisation more broadly are at the core of what defines inclusion (McKinsey 2020b). These experiences dictate how employees feel connected to their workplace, how encouraged they are to bring their full, authentic selves to work, and how they feel empowered to make meaningful contributions (Exhibit 39). Research has shown inclusion is critical for both developing and retaining talent, especially retaining talented women (McKinsey 2019b and 2020c):

- Employees who feel included in their organisation are nearly three times more likely than their peers to feel excited by and committed to their organisation.
- The perceived lack of inclusion can cause employees' career progression to stall or even stagnate, and especially so for women (42 per cent of women have opted not to pursue or accept a position because they believed the organisation would not be an inclusive place to work, ascompared to 32 per cent of men[16]).

Promoting an inclusive workplace culture relies on awareness-raising, training, positive reinforcement and accountability

Research shows that executives spend, on average, almost 40 per cent of their time in meetings, meaning that women leaders often find themselves in situations where discriminatory behaviours typically take place. Since these experiences are shaped primarily by interactions with managers and peers, all employees need to be empowered to be part of the solution. Organisations can take several actions to facilitate and accelerate such empowerment, including, but not limited to raising awareness and investing in ongoing education, encouraging positive reinforcing behaviours, monitoring progress, and enforcing accountability (McKinsey 2021b, Innovation Fund Denmark and McKinsey 2018):

Exhibit 39
Illustration of the core components of inclusion

Overall inclusion	
Personal experience	**Enterprise perception**
Authenticity	**Acceptance**
Individuals feel encouraged to be themselves and speak up at work	Employees value and embrace diversity
Belonging	**Camaraderie**
Individuals feel connected to others at work	Employees have strong bonds and work together towards shared goals
Meaningful work	**Fairness**
Individuals feel their work is personally meaningful and valued, and contributes to the company's success	Employees receive equitable treatment and have a fair chance of success

Source: McKinsey; People & Organisational Performance, 2021a

15 Examples include feeling the need to justify their expertise or having it questioned by others, being interrupted more than others, and/or having others comment negatively on their emotional state (e.g., they are too angry, feisty, emotional).
16 Among over 2,000 surveyed participants at the Women's Forum Global Meeting 19 – survey conducted by McKinsey (2019b).

1 Raising awareness and investing in ongoing education

i. Raising awareness about the experiences of women by encouraging to share data openly (e.g., from satisfaction surveys).

ii. Bringing in thought-provoking speakers related to DE&I topics.

iii. Offering training to employees to inform about behavioural biases [17].

2 Encouraging positive reinforcing behaviours and monitoring progress

i. Promoting a culture of continuous feedback and positive recognition.

ii. Employing guidelines and principles to increase inclusiveness in meetings (e.g., colleagues are encouraged to give room to each other to express their viewpoints and avoid interrupting).

iii. Conducting higher frequency of employee satisfaction surveys (less comprehensive) and follow-up on low-scoring teams/ departments.

3 Enforcing accountability

i. Establishing clear roles, what is everyone responsible for in progressing DE&I and getting buy-in from senior leaders.

ii. Creating a direct link between effort and consequence to build transparency on how DE&I efforts are recognised.

iii. Employing disciplinary processes to eliminate harassment, bullying and discriminatory behaviour (e.g., discriminatory behaviours tied to performance reviews, enforcement of zero-tolerance policies, clear procedures on reporting discriminatory/inappropriate behaviours).

iv. Ensuring that employees can report harassment, bullying, and discriminatory behaviours through formal and informal channels (also anonymously) regardless of an employee's seniority, role, or performance.

Best-in-class promotions processes are designed around a set of core principles to ensure fairness

When performance evaluations are based on subjective impressions held by supervisors, the risk of introducing substantial bias to promotion processes and misallocating employees in positions increases (Prendergast and Topel 1996). Making promotion processes transparent not only reduces the risk of discriminating or favouring certain employee groups, but it also increases the perceived integrity of leaders among employees (Rohman, Onyeagoro and Bush 2018) and creates clarity on what the requirements are for advancing along the career ladder. It also establishes a very clear bar and set of requirements needed to progress ahead at the workplace. While performance management processes are often adapted to the size of the organisation and local context, organisations can follow practices to minimise the risk of introducing biases:

- **Ensure consistency in performance management and execution of processes** – deviation from and wide variations in process/execution across teams and divisions can lead to disadvantages for underrepresented groups (Aguinis 2019).

- **Define clear, objective and debiased evaluation criteria** and build scoring guides that illustrate multiple demonstrations of high performance – the absence of clear criteria and robust processes allows for subjectivity and can lead to unconscious biases (Nishiura Mackenzie, Wehner, and Correll 2019).

- **Establish training for managers/staffers** to educate them about potential biases that might affect performance assessments (e.g., anchoring bias, affinity bias[18]) and refresh fair and consistent recruiting process execution.

- **Create diverse promotion slate requirements** from the eligibility pool (e.g., 20 per cent of employees considered for a position are from underrepresented groups or equally split gender pools are considered for a position).

- **Align manager incentives to maintain consistency in the execution** of performance management processes (e.g., periodic feedback to employees, evaluation write-ups).

- **Measure, track, and report evaluation outcomes** by gender to identify the location(s) and magnitude of potential biases.

- **Communicate and make the promotion process transparent** for employees to limit the perceived ambiguity and/or unfairness of the process.

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17 Note that the evidence on the effectiveness of mandatory trainings is mixed, especially those that force on participants to behave differently (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Such trainings tend to lead to deepening biased behavior as employees often do not conform to rules aiming at limiting pre-defined behaviors. Instead, trainings should engage managers and executives to jointly understand the issues with underrepresentation of minorities and foster on-the-job contact with minority employee groups.

18 Anchoring bias refers to a cognitive bias where a person relies heavily on initial information on a given topic to draw conclusions instead of evaluating it objectively against other pieces of information. Affinity bias refers to a cognitive bias (also referred to as 'similarity' bias), where people tend to connect and favour people, behaviors, interests like their own.

In addition to following best-practice guidelines for performance management, organisations can further equalise performance appraisal by:

1 **Debiasing recruitment processes** by both increasing awareness around bias but also adopting tools to eliminate bias. Recruitment is one of the most central processes of organisations and still, a vast amount of research shows that recruitment processes and decisions also for high-profile positions continue to be affected by gender bias and discrimination (Heilman, Manzi, and Braun 2015).
2 **Regularly performing audits of equal pay for equal work** across the organisation to ensure rigorous compliance with the Danish Consolidation Act on Equal Pay to Men and Women – on average, men earn 14 per cent more than women in Denmark (Retsinformation 2022; Eurostat 2022a).

Consideration 5 – Visibly commit to DE&I goals, establish accountability for meeting goals with leaders and formally recognise employees' DE&I efforts

DE&I goals are effective means of driving change when leaders are held accountable and share transparency on progress against an established baseline

Improving DE&I in organisations requires changing organisational behaviour. Research has found that setting DE&I goals while holding individuals and organisations accountable for meeting those goals is an evidence-based effective way of improving DE&I (Berkman 2018; Bohnet and Chilazi 2020). However, the survey analysis established that only between 16 and 33 per cent of employees across roles and gender believe their organisation took concrete action to meet DE&I goals, and only 14-29 per cent report that leaders are held accountable for meeting DE&I goals.

Bohnet and Chilazi (2020) argue that goals motivate the will to change because they involve accountability, rewards/public recognition, and induce competition, while providing direction on how to change by focusing attention and inducing persistence/commitment. The commitment of

business leaders is therefore vital since the goals and priorities set at the top cascade down in the organisation and influence goals set at the lower levels. Academic research (Bohnet and Chilazi 2020; Castilla 2015, Chilazi and Bohnet 2020) and real-life examples suggest that achieving DE&I goals require a set of key interventions such as:

1 Assigning accountability for reaching each DE&I goal to a specific person, unit or group in the organisation and providing incentives for meeting the goals.
2 Providing transparency around and communicating the DE&I goals but also the process to achieve them (both internally and in public announcements).
3 Monitoring progress and reporting DE&I results in a simple and comparable manner via e.g., dashboards with monthly revenue snapshots of the organisation's DE&I metrics and/or monthly diversity reports broken down by department with relevant benchmarking.
4 Engaging and nominating front-line employees to actively participate in DE&I-improving efforts such as recruitment, unconscious bias trainings and talent development of women.

There are already examples of several large companies who are releasing annual diversity reports detailing their current DE&I status in their organisation, including several members of The Diversity Council.

Measurable targets should be in place in order to assign accountability and provide incentives for meeting DE&I ambition

Assigning accountability and rewarding leaders for meeting DE&I goals is important for ensuring tangible progress. Yet, the survey analysis reveals that 38 to 63 per cent of employees across roles believe that there is no formal recognition of DE&I efforts, or they are unaware of whether efforts are recognised formally (except for men executives, of which 27 per cent believe so). To effectively determine whether goals are achieved or not, organisations must define a list of relevant metrics to monitor and evaluate continuously. Even though metrics often are industry- or even company-specific and adapted to local context/demographics, Bohnet and Chilazi (2020) argue that all companies benefit from tracking metrics around workforce composition, hiring, promotions, performance evaluations, attribution and pay (Table 4). After organisations set

specific, measurable targets and goals, organisations can further incentivise the accountable people, units, and/or groups by tying progress to performance reviews and bonus pay-outs.

In theory, gender equality in management positions is achieved when there is an equal representation of all genders. However, since there are already gender imbalances in the beginning of the talent pipeline, we argue that organisations should aspire to have a proportional ratio of women to men at the entry level. Organisations can then use all means to improve the gender balance throughout the career ladder using all strategies available – e.g., through promotions, external/internal lateral hiring, and improved retention.

Table 4

Detailed DE&I metrics for organisations to track (adapted from the Harvard Kennedy School 2020)

Data	Example metrics (non-exhaustive)
Workforce composition	• Employees by function/ level/ tenure/ gender (or other demographics) • Employee status (full-time/ part-time/ contractor) by gender • Gender representation in management (incl. executives/ board) • Employees reporting to managers (women and men) by tenure/ level/ role
Hiring	• Number and percentage of job applicants by gender/ role/ level/ channel (e.g., referrals, own website), and application stage (e.g., CV drop, first round interview, final round interview) • Number and percentage of women and men hired by role/ level/ function
Promotions	• Number and percentage of women and men promoted by level compared to the available pool (i.e., gender composition at level from which promoted from) • Tenure in previous role and at the company overall before promotion by gender/ level/ function
Performance evaluations	• Performance scores/ evaluations given to women and men by level/ manager/ function/ tenure in company/ tenure in current role • Correlation between performance scores and promotions by gender • Available qualitative data on performance (e.g., write-ups – analyse language used and length of write-ups by gender to see if there are discrepancies)
Talent development	• Number and percentage of women selected for developmental programmes (e.g., leadership trainings, high-potential development track) • Analyse nominations, invitations to participate, and eventual attendance/ participation • Number and percentage of women named in succession and talent plans (i.e., leadership pipeline by gender) • Work/ project assignment by gender • Number and percentage of women participating in mentorship/ sponsorship programmes • Correlate to career outcomes like promotions (if possible)
Attrition	• Number and percentage of women and men leaving the organisation by level/ function/ performance history/ tenure at company at time of exit • Analyse voluntary and involuntary exits separately • Any qualitative data (e.g., exit interview responses) analysed by gender
Pay	• Compensation by gender/ level/ tenure/ education/ office/ geography/ performance scores/ type of pay (base salary, stock awards, equity grants, performance bonuses) • Pay gaps within jobs and across/ between jobs and departments/ functions • Starting pay for new hires in the organisation, controlling for level, function, tenure, education, office etc.
Other	• Employee satisfaction/ engagement scores and survey results by gender of respondent • Internal and external complaints (e.g., discrimination, bias, harassment) and resolution status

Concluding remarks

This chapter outlined specific initiatives that both public and private institutions can undertake to tackle the identified obstacles along the career lifecycle leading to gender imbalance in leadership roles. The considerations aim to tackle barriers to career advancement starting from the beginning of the career journey up until the very top of the career ladder.

The path to impact across considerations is different and depends on the ambition level, the starting point from which organisations are departing and the end goal that they want to achieve. To reap the greatest benefits from initiatives aiming at bringing more gender equality in leadership roles, it is important that both private and public organisations collaborate and commit to common goals. Public institutions can foster the public debate, raise awareness in society, challenge existing norms and establish new policies, building on the experience of neighbouring countries. Private institutions can invest in equalising the playing field across genders, put in place processes and practices to support equally career advancement of all genders and foster an even more inclusive culture along the career ladder.

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