

ALL FOR ONE: ENGAGING MEN AS ALLIES

November 2023

Results from a survey
conducted by The Brussels
Binder & Robert Baker



Table of contents

| | | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|----|
| I. | Introduction | 1 |
| II. | Profile of Respondents | 4 |
| III. | Definitions | 7 |
| IV. | Motivation for Engaging | 9 |
| V. | Forms of Engagement | 11 |
| VI. | Challenges to Engagement | 13 |
| VII. | Benefits of Engagement | 15 |
| VIII. | Looking Ahead | 17 |
| IX. | Conclusions and Recommendations | 21 |
| | Acknowledgements | 25 |
| | Bibliography (and helpful resources) | 26 |

I. Introduction

a. Context

The Brussels Binder (BB) is a volunteer-based organisation that advocates for more diversity in EU policy debates. Founded in 2016, the BB provides a [database](#) that hosts over 1,500 profiles of women with expertise across different fields. It has become a go-to resource for event organisers wishing to ensure balanced, inclusive, and innovative panel discussions that contribute to effective policy-making. Beyond this critical resource, the Binder works with partners to develop tools and organise events aimed at amplifying women's voices and promoting inclusive and diverse debates in Brussels and beyond. At the heart of our mission is an unwavering commitment to an intersectional approach, firmly grounded in the belief that representation serves as the cornerstone for the advancement of gender equality.

Achieving true gender equality demands the collective efforts of all, and cannot be the responsibility of women alone. A world where every individual enjoys equal rights and opportunities not only benefits society as a whole but also holds tremendous advantages for men themselves. Beyond the often-cited [economic](#) and [employment-related](#) benefits, more gender equality means more freedom for men to express themselves without judgment. It means empowering men to break from the confines of gender stereotypes and acknowledge the unjust societal expectations that often lead to the manifestation of toxic masculinity – a harmful [byproduct of gender inequity](#) whereby men adopt damaging behaviours they falsely associate with masculinity.

Engaging more men in gender equality is undeniably a win-win, and it holds a prominent position in the Brussels Binder's strategic priorities. As part of our efforts to foster meaningful dialogues with men regarding their role as agents of change, we partnered with [Robert Baker](#), Vice Chair at European Women on Boards and CEO of Potentia Talent Consulting Limited, which consults companies and trustee boards on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

A recognised thought leader, speaker, mentor and consultant, Robert has been helping organisations build inclusive workforces and has experience in engaging men in gender equality. Together with Robert, we administered a [survey](#) designed to assess how engaged the men in our network are, how they perceive the benefits of involvement in gender equality and the hurdles they face in trying to become better allies for women. The Brussels Binder is grateful to Robert for his guidance and the experience he has shared from running similar surveys in the past.

b. Definitions

While there is no universally accepted definition of a “male ally”, several key elements can be identified in existing literature. The [Harvard Business Review](#), for example, defines male allies as “members of an advantaged group committed to building relationships with women, expressing as little sexism in their own behaviour as possible, understanding the social privilege conferred by their gender, and demonstrating active efforts to address gender inequities at work and in society.” Meanwhile, the [HeForShe campaign](#) initiated by the United Nations considers male allies to be “those men committed to building positive relationships with women, taking into consideration the inequalities present in the world today and taking everyday actions to address them.” More generally, [Good et al.](#) have defined an “ally” as “anyone who confronts sexism that is not specifically directed at them personally; in other words, a person who confronts on behalf of someone else.”

While we did not include a definition of “male ally” in the survey in order to determine what men themselves believe the term to entail, we did specify what we mean by “engagement in gender balance” before asking respondents to rate themselves in this field. Our definition, upon consultation with Robert Baker, was:



the active promotion of gender equality in one’s personal and/or professional life through different means, including fostering supportive and collaborative relationships with women and undertaking acts of sponsorship and advocacy intended to drive systemic improvements to the experiences and representation of women at all levels of an organisation.

The Brussels Binder strives for inclusivity in all its activities and communications. We recognize that we are still learning, however, and are always open to constructive, honest conversations and feedback on how to further improve.

c. Methodology

The aim of this project was to better understand how men engage in gender equality, the benefits they see from doing so and the challenges they face in becoming better allies to women. To investigate this, we launched a survey consisting of 22 questions. The survey was published on the Brussels Binder's [website](#) and shared on its social media channels (X, LinkedIn and Instagram). It was cross-sectional - that is, aimed at collecting data from a population at a specific point in time rather than over time - and was open for six weeks, from 3 July to 14 August 2023. 141 responses were received.

A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected data was then carried out by a Brussels Binder volunteer-led task force, with guidance and input from Robert Baker. For the open-ended questions (11 out of 22), a content and thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring words and concepts, and to detect patterns in responses. As for the closed questions, calculations using Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel were done to find the most popular answers and relevant percentages. Cross-tabulation or filtering was used to get the results of an answer by subgroup (for example, filtered by age or employment sector).

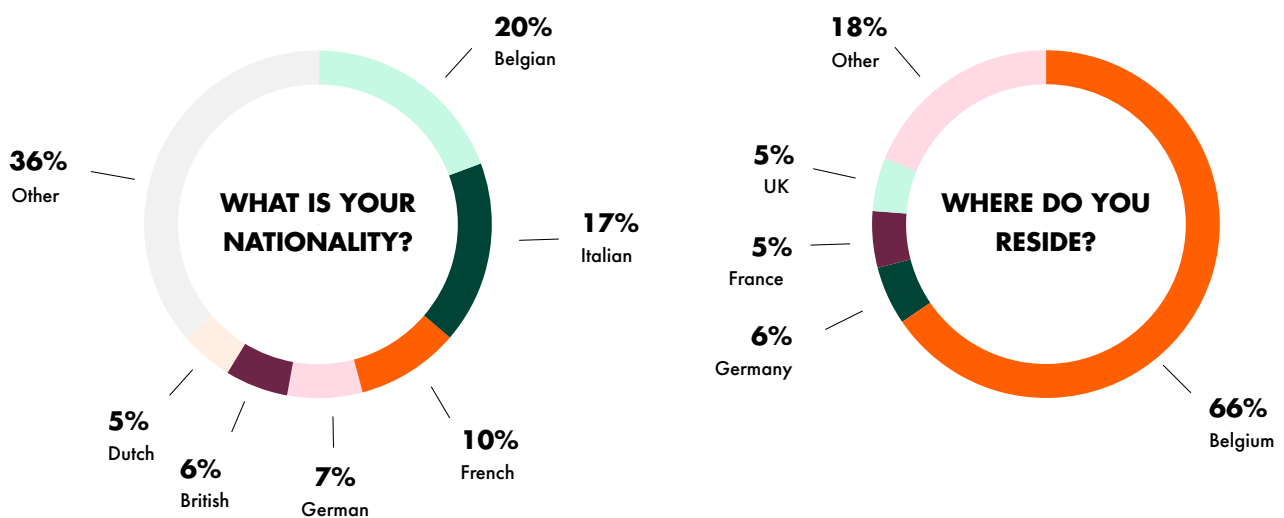
The above-outlined methodology as well as the survey itself are not without limitations. Firstly, a larger sample size would undoubtedly provide a more accurate picture of men's attitudes toward gender equality. The demographic diversity of the sample was also limited, with a majority of respondents being based in Belgium (66%), which is largely explained by the fact that the BB is a Brussels-based organisation and that the survey was disseminated first and foremost in volunteers' networks. The latter - as well as the fact that the survey was conducted online - may also mean that the collected data is somewhat skewed toward a younger audience: 42.6% of respondents were between 26 and 35 years old. Importantly, the survey did not ask men to reveal their race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability, or any other identity factors. While these intersectional identities were beyond the scope of this survey, their inclusion would provide meaningful insights and should be considered as a potential avenue for future research on this topic, and as a way of expanding this particular exercise. Asking men about their role/seniority at work could be another way to improve the survey design.

Finally, when it comes to the data analysis, it must be acknowledged that content and thematic analysis involve subjective interpretation, can be subject to human error, and do not allow for a more complex, context-sensitive analysis of the text.

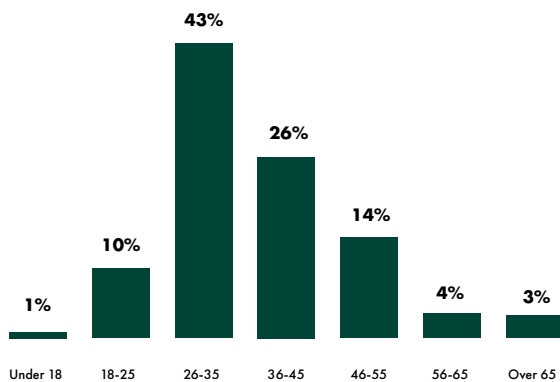
II. Profile of Respondents

To better understand the background of the men who chose to respond to our survey, we opened with questions about their nationality, place of residence, age, and employment sector. Upon analysing the data, we found that our respondents came from all around the world, representing **34 nationalities** and **5 continents**. Most, however, were European, with Belgium (19.5%), Italy (17.3%), France (10%) and Germany (7.2%) being most highly represented. Our average respondent **lives in Belgium**, and is not based in their native country; only 17.3% of respondents live in their country of origin.

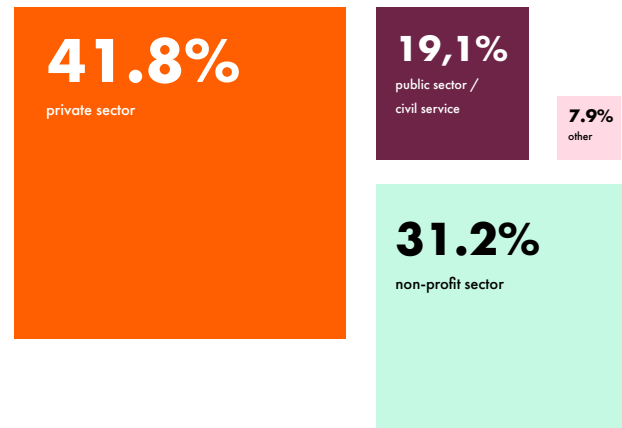
The majority of the respondents were **between 26 and 35 years old** (42.6%) when taking the survey. The second most represented age group was 36 to 45 year-olds, constituting a quarter of all respondents. The youngest segment of our respondents (18 to 25 years old) is **mainly composed of students** (64.3%). As noted above, the overrepresentation of young people may be due to the online nature of the survey and the means of dissemination, namely the Brussels Binder volunteers' network.



WHAT IS YOUR AGE?



WHAT SECTOR DO YOU WORK IN?



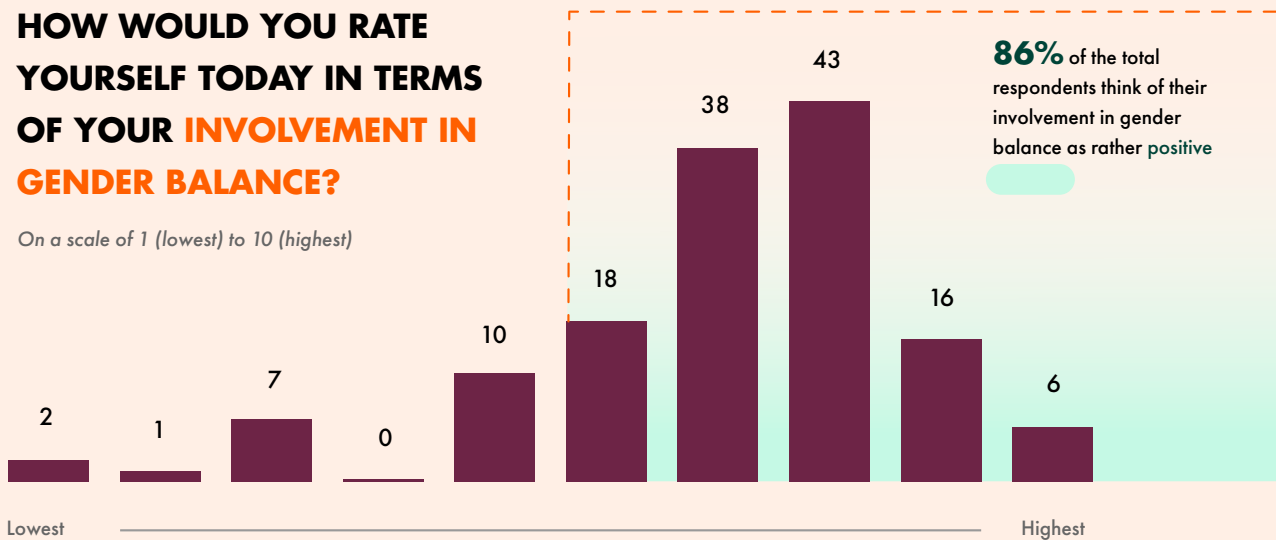
When it comes to employment, the majority of respondents work in the **private sector (41.8%)**. The **non-profit (31.2%)** and **public sector/civil service (19.1%)**, however, are also well represented. Respondents were given the opportunity to specify which organisations they worked for. Among these are EU institutions and agencies (the European External Action Service, European Commission, European Parliament, and European Central Bank), the International Organisation for Migration, the European Climate Foundation, a sustainability network in Belgium called The Shift, think tanks like FEPS and Friends of Europe, and a variety of NGOs as well as consultancies.

Respondents were also asked to rate their own involvement in gender equality, which we defined as *engagement in gender balance to be the active promotion of gender equality in one's personal and/or professional life through different means, including fostering supportive and collaborative relationships with women and undertaking acts of sponsorship and advocacy intended to drive systemic improvements to the experiences and representation of women at all levels of an organisation*. Generally, men considered their engagement to be above average, with **86%** of respondents rating themselves **6 out of 10** or higher.

Self-perception seems to correlate partly with age: among the respondents that gave themselves at the **highest mark (10)**, **66.7% were 36 or older**. Only one of the respondents who rated themselves 10 is aged 18 to 25 years old. On the other end of the spectrum, one of the 2 respondents that gave themselves the lowest mark (1) is the only respondent declaring themselves to be aged over 65 and a pensioner. Nearly half (44.4%) of the respondents rating themselves 3 and below are aged 26 to 35. In terms of employment, individuals rating themselves 7 and above tend to be working in non-profit organisations (35.9%). One possible explanation could be that they are more likely to work in advocacy and to be educated on gender equality issues.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOURSELF TODAY IN TERMS OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN GENDER BALANCE?

On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest)



III. Definitions

In one of the first questions, respondents were asked what they consider the term “male ally” to mean. 121 men answered, providing valuable insights into their perceptions of allyship. A substantial **39%** of the respondents said that being a male ally entails a **commitment to supporting equality**, emphasizing that this extends beyond gender-related issues. A couple respondents argued that an ally would support not only women but all “marginalised” or “underrepresented” groups and that the act of allyship should go “beyond gender lines”.

Furthermore, **22%** of the respondents emphasized the **action-oriented nature of male allyship**, and **10%** highlighted the importance of actively **challenging harmful behaviours** and stereotypes associated with a certain gender. Collectively, these responses underline the notion that being an ally is about walking the talk and taking proactive steps and initiatives in pursuit of equality.

Almost a quarter of the respondents recognized that male allyship involves self-awareness, stressing the significance of understanding, **acknowledging and reflecting on one’s own privilege**. Another common theme was the importance of **understanding the injustices** and obstacles women face. These findings suggest that men see the recognition of their privileges and of women’s struggles as essential characteristics of a male ally. As one respondent put it, it is about being



aware of gender struggles and [using one’s] privilege to educate other males, deconstructing gender norms and resigning to behaviours that preserve patriarchy.

Multiple respondents pointed to the significance of advocating and speaking up for marginalized groups while several others stressed the need to actively defend women against sexism and misogyny. Several men surveyed emphasized creating space and

giving a voice to minorities as key aspects of male allyship. For one respondent, an ally is *“someone who creates space - whether personally or structurally - for the voices and development of others who traditionally haven’t been heard or given space to grow.”*

Moreover, there was a smaller but notable emphasis on the need for men to educate themselves and others about gender-related issues and inequality, and the importance of leveraging their positions of power to support the marginalized. Finally, it is worth noting that 7% of the respondents emphasised the importance of allyship in both personal and private life. This subset of responses underscores the idea that being a male ally is not limited to public actions or societal contexts alone. Instead, these individuals recognise that allyship extends into one’s personal relationships, family life, and private interactions.

These responses collectively reflect the multifaceted understanding of male allyship among the surveyed men, and point to the complex and holistic nature of being an ally.

A male ally is...



A male who acknowledges their privilege in society, understands the significant disadvantages women and non-binary folks face in society, in both their professional and personal lives, and works actively to build a society where patriarchal structures are dismantled and a more free and fair society is built that is inclusive to all.



A man that supports gender equality actively in all situations and wants to learn about how to reduce gender inequality.



A male human who understands systemic and cultural inequalities and addresses them with the aim of creating a more inclusive, conscious and gender equal environment around himself as well as for others.



A(n identifying) male person using their privilege and power to the benefit of marginalised/underrepresented groups.



A male who understands that women live in a man's world and that that needs to change.

IV. Motivation for Engaging

In the survey, we explored the key motivation triggers for men's involvement with gender equality. Looking at the results, it is evident that the primary motivation for men to engage in gender equality initiatives is rooted in their **values, particularly a sense of justice and fairness**. This response, chosen by **74.5%** of the respondents, indicates a strong ethical inclination towards creating a more equitable and just society.

The fact that only **10.6%** of respondents cited their positive experiences with diverse role models suggests that personal experiences and exposure to individuals challenging traditional gender roles have had a relatively lesser, however not negligible, impact on men's willingness to participate in promoting gender equality.

Furthermore, a small proportion of the respondents, **3.5%**, mentioned their **desire to benefit others in their family** as a motivation for their gender equality efforts. This signifies a familial or interpersonal connection, indicating that some men may be driven by a sense of responsibility towards their loved ones (e.g. daughters, sisters, or mothers).

Interestingly, only **2.1%** of the respondents cited **career progression** (e.g. the desire to become a better leader) as their motivation for engaging in promoting gender equality. This indicates that, at least

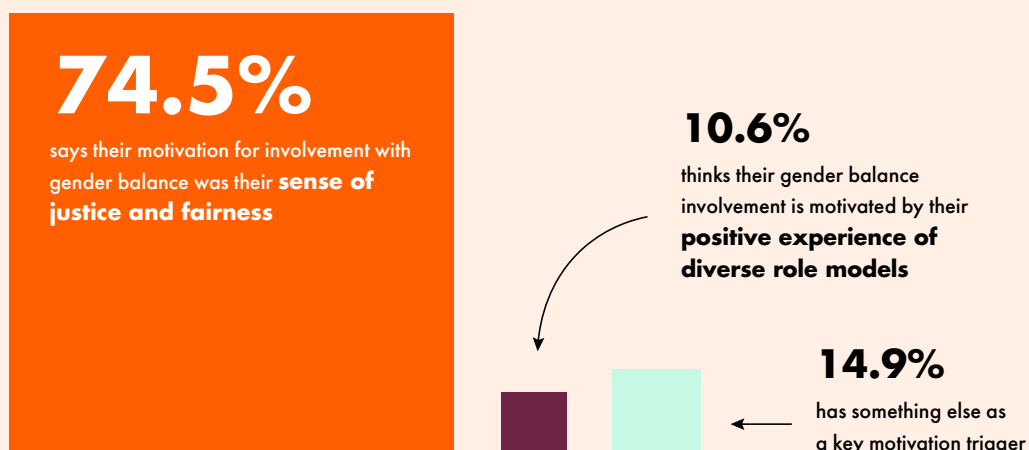
among this surveyed group, professional advancement does not seem to be a significant driving force behind their involvement in advocating for gender equality.

The additional responses provided by some participants indicate the influence of external factors on their motivations. For instance, one respondent mentioned that their **beliefs and attitudes were challenged by other men**, leading them to initiate conversations with the women in their lives. This suggests that peer influence and personal growth play a crucial role in shaping their commitment to gender equality.

Another response highlighted the **challenge of conforming to the traditional notion of an alpha male**, indicating that some men may feel pressured to fit into a certain societal mold, which can, in turn, prompt them to support gender balance initiatives. It also hints at the fact that men themselves have a lot to gain from gender equality.

Overall, these survey results suggest that while personal values, a sense of justice and fairness are the primary motivations for men's involvement in promoting gender equality, a combination of personal experiences, family considerations, and societal pressures also play significant roles in driving men to become better allies.

KEY MOTIVATION FOR GENDER BALANCE EFFORTS



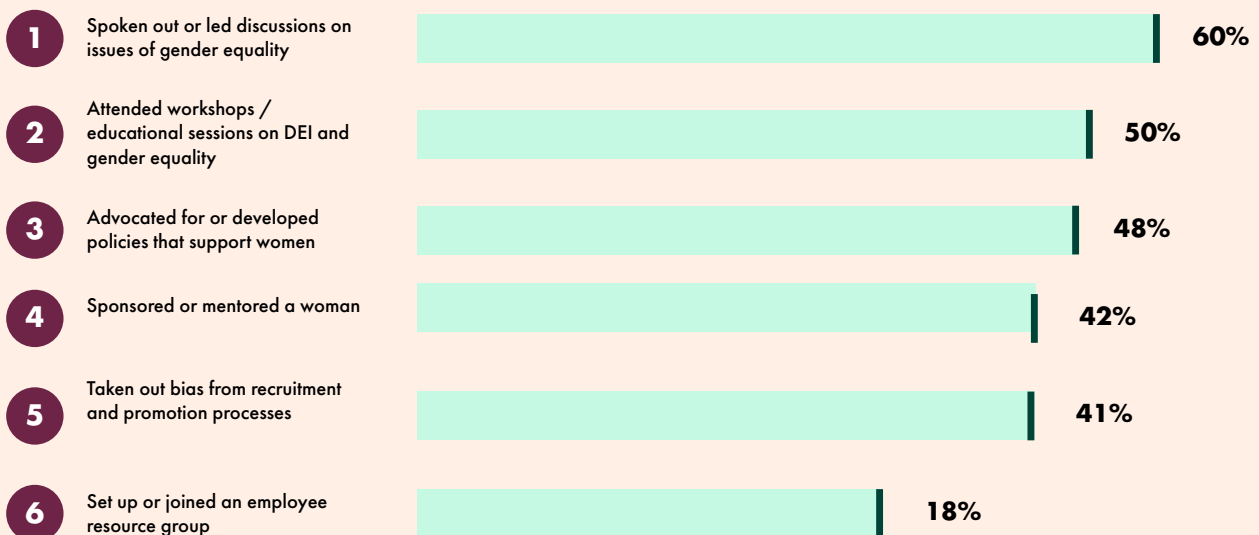
V. Forms of Engagement

To better understand men's actions in support of gender equality, we asked them about steps they have taken to advance this cause inside their organisation. In a separate question, we enquired about steps they have taken to become a (better) male ally more broadly.

In response to the former, men were given the chance to choose more than one action. While not by a significant margin, the most commonly selected answer was **“speaking out or leading discussions on issues of gender equality”**, which **59.6%** of the respondents claimed to have done. **49.6%** of surveyed men said they have been supporting gender equality in the workplace by **“attending workshops/educational sessions on DEI and gender equality”**. The action of **“advocating for or developing policies that support women”** (for example flexible/hybrid working, matched parental leave, subsidised childcare provision) came in close behind, having been selected by **47.5%** of the respondents.

TOP ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

Inside the respondents' organizations (multiple answers allowed)



Almost **41%** of the surveyed men claimed to have “**taken out bias from recruitment and promotion processes**” while nearly **42%** said they advanced gender equality by “**sponsoring or mentoring a woman**”, whether formally or informally.

By far the least popular answer in terms of actions men have taken to advance gender equality at the workplace was the “**setting up or joining of an employee resource group**” (for example established or joined a women’s network or DEI task force in your workplace), with only **18.4%** of men having taken this step. This could be explained by the fact that relative to other answer options, this one is more time- and effort-intensive, assuming that the resource group would have regular activities as opposed to one-off workshops or sessions men may have joined.

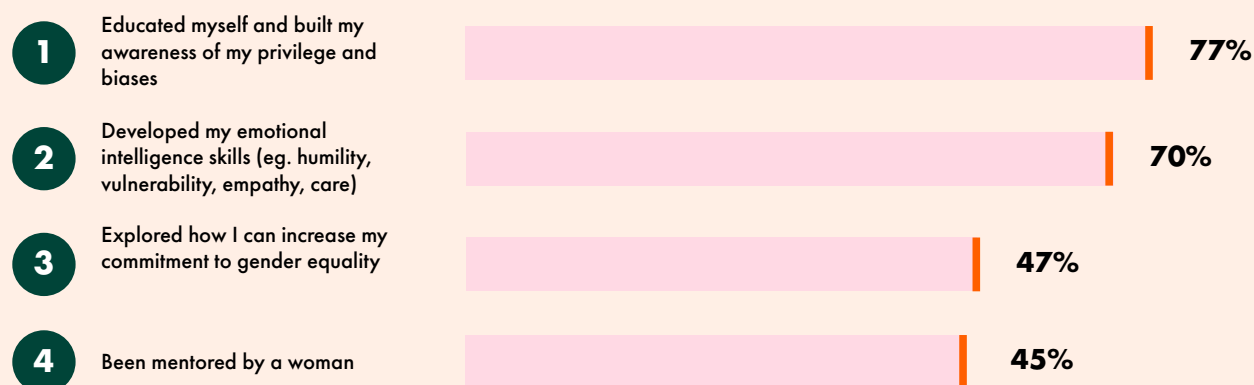
In response to the question about what they have proactively done to become a (better) male ally, men were invited to choose one or more of four provided answer options. Interestingly, nearly all of the respondents selected **two or more forms of engagement**, reflecting their willingness to lean into gender equality in a variety of ways and a desire to improve as allies to women.

77.3% of the respondents claimed that they “**educated themselves and built their awareness of their privilege and biases**”, making this the most popular answer option. An action nearly three quarters of the surveyed men (**70.2%**) claimed to take was “**developing their emotional intelligence skills**”, including humility, vulnerability, empathy and care.

The slightly less common steps taken by the surveyed men were “**exploring how they can increase their commitment to gender equality**” - chosen by **46.8%** of respondents - and “**being mentored by a woman**”, which **44.7%** of the men declared to have done.

STEPS TAKEN PROACTIVELY TO BECOME A (BETTER) MALE ALLY

(multiple answers allowed)



VI. Challenges to Engagement

The results of our survey reveal a variety of challenges that men face in becoming better allies. The multiple-choice responses indicate that a combination of factors contributes to these challenges, including:

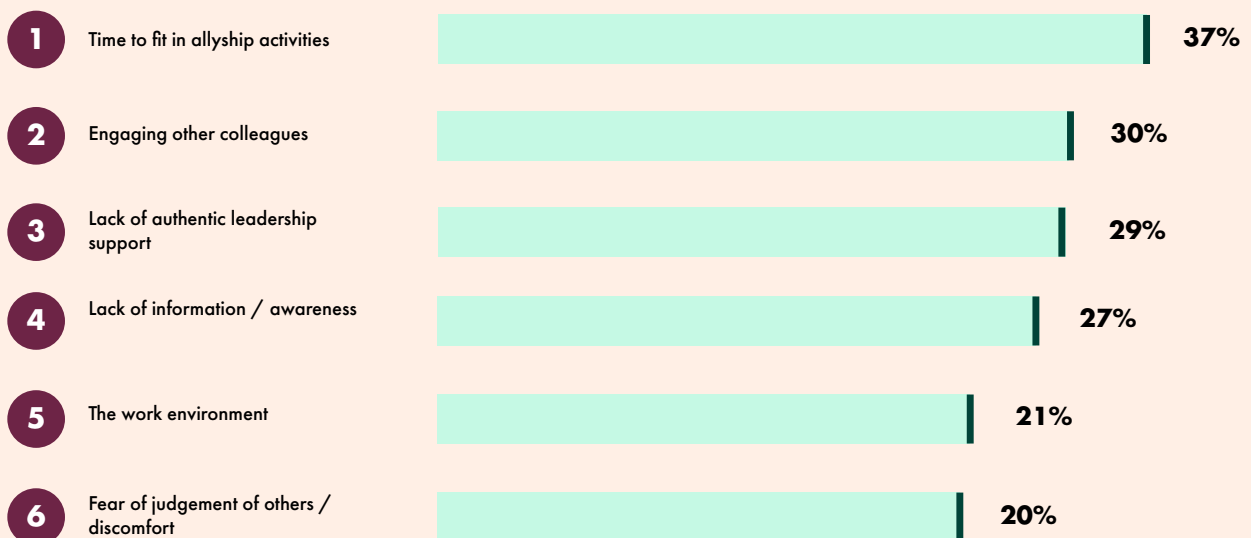
- **Time constraints (36.9%):** Many men find it challenging to allocate time for allyship activities within their already busy schedules. This suggests that the demand for allyship initiatives may exceed the available time, impacting their active participation.
- **Engaging other colleagues (29.8%):** Encouraging other male colleagues to participate actively in promoting gender equality appears to be a significant challenge, highlighting the complexities involved in fostering collective engagement and commitment.
- **Lack of authentic leadership support (29.1%):** The absence of genuine support from leaders within the organisational hierarchy might hinder the progress of allyship initiatives. Authentic leadership backing is essential to create an inclusive environment where allyship can flourish.
- **Lack of information awareness (27%):** A notable challenge identified by the respondents is the absence of adequate information or awareness regarding gender equality issues and effective allyship practices. This potentially signifies a need for comprehensive education and awareness programmes to foster a better understanding of the challenges at hand.
- **The work environment (20.6%):** Issues related to the work environment, possibly encompassing the organisational culture, norms and practices, seem to pose barriers to effective allyship efforts.
- **Fear of judgment from others (19.9%):** The fear of being judged by peers or colleagues for actively participating in allyship initiatives could hinder men's willingness to engage.

The concrete answers provided by some participants further highlight specific challenges encountered in their journey to becoming better male allies. These include personal biases, the scarcity of female colleagues in technical fields, and the presence of toxic behaviours from both men and women, which can impede the progress of gender equality efforts. Furthermore, the observation of all men being stereotyped or generalized negatively in social media discussions regarding women's issues is also identified as a disheartening factor, possibly influencing their motivation and commitment towards allyship.

Overall, these results emphasize the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by men in their efforts to become effective allies in promoting gender equality, underscoring the need for comprehensive support structures, cultural shifts, and awareness programmes within workplaces and society at large.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN BECOMING A BETTER MALE ALLY

(multiple answers allowed)



VII. Benefits of Engagement

The survey enquired whether men believed their gender equality efforts had a positive impact on their organisations and on themselves as leaders and/or colleagues.

While **37%** of respondents **saw benefits for their workplace**, a striking trend is that **more than half** of the respondents said they **did not know** whether their organisation was performing better as a result of their engagement in gender equality. This could be due to a difficulty in quantifying the improvements in performance, particularly in a large organisation. As one respondent put it:



In a big institution like the EU, it's hard for me to know the real impacts of my engagement.

There is, of course, also a question of correlation versus causation, and perhaps a hesitance among some men to claim that an organisation's improved performance was a direct result of their efforts. Younger men especially may feel like they have limited means and power to be agents of change when it comes to gender equality in the workplace, with one respondent noting



I am currently too junior to have a significant impact aside from raising awareness with peers.

Men in the **non-profit sector tended to be more convinced** of the positive impact their gender equality efforts had on their organisation (41%), compared to those working in the private sector (34%) or public sector/civil service (33%). The percentage of men who were not sure about their efforts' impact on organisational performance was also smaller in the non-profit sector (48%) than in the private (58%) or public (59%) sectors. While this difference is arguably marginal, it is an interesting result considering that objectively, an organisation's performance is more easily measured when there

is profit, suggesting men in the private sector would be able to measure their company's success over time more easily.

When asked *how* they measure or define their organisation's success (if they answered 'yes' to the question about their gender equality efforts improving organisational performance), the most common answer, provided by 12 respondents, was an **increased number of women employees**, including in leadership and/or managerial roles. 6 men reported an **improved atmosphere** or employee satisfaction at the workplace, with someone mentioning a "happy and progressive workforce." Greater effectiveness of the team as well as increased creativity and diversity of ideas and perspectives were also common threads in men's responses.



Diverse teams perform better and if everyone feels well in an organisation, this will benefit the performance of all,

one respondent stated. Finally, more equal pay was mentioned by 3 respondents, while 2 mentioned a growing awareness of gender equality or feminist issues more broadly within their organisation.

When it comes to the individual level, an overwhelming majority of men (**82%**) were convinced that **engaging in gender equality issues makes them a better leader and/or colleague**. No notable differences were found when analysing men's responses by sector. When asked how they would define or measure their improvement as a colleague or leader, 14 men mentioned **recognition or positive feedback from colleagues**, including women. 9 said they believed their progress as a colleague/leader were reflected in their **improved relationships with colleagues**, with one respondent noting that they feel closer to their female colleagues and able to



build better trust relationships based on honest engagement and resolving of conflict or difficult conversations.

Many respondents mentioned they had become more open-minded and considerate of others' opinions, with someone stating:

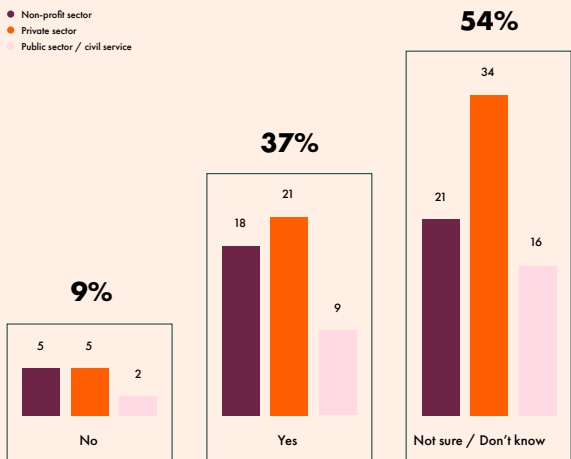


I am more considerate, balanced, and open to changing my mind. I have become less prone to feeling offended if I am proven wrong.

Another common thread was an increased awareness of injustices and challenges women face, and the recognition of one's privilege. Several respondents noted that they had taken action to ensure a safe space for all genders and embraced new practices in their daily tasks to support women and/or the cause of gender equality more broadly. A few respondents reported an improved atmosphere in their team, and several others cited increased productivity.

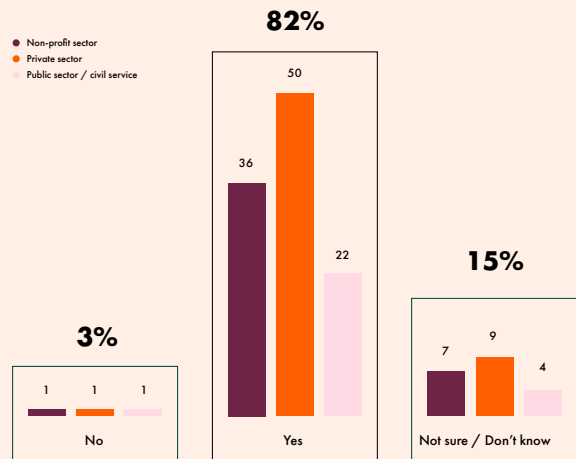
DO YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION IS PERFORMING BETTER AS A RESULT OF YOUR EFFORTS IN SUPPORT OF GENDER EQUALITY?

- Non-profit sector
- Private sector
- Public sector / civil service



DO YOU THINK YOU ARE A BETTER LEADER / COLLEAGUE AS A RESULT OF YOUR AWARENESS OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES?

- Non-profit sector
- Private sector
- Public sector / civil service



VIII. Looking Ahead

a. Inclusive leadership

The survey also prompted men to reflect on the inclusive leadership competencies they feel they need to work on most. These competencies are essential for fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment. The survey data reveals that the key areas in which men think they need to improve in most are:

- **Recognition of bias (61%):** This overwhelming response emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing biases in oneself and others. It highlights an awareness of the significant impact that bias can have on decision-making processes and interpersonal relationships within the workplace.
- **Cultural intelligence (47.5%):** This reflects an understanding of the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity in promoting inclusivity and understanding diverse perspectives.
- **Vulnerability (34.8%):** This result hints at a recognition among men that being open and vulnerable is essential for building trust and fostering genuine connections, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive workplace culture.
- **Empathy (24.1%):** This underscores the importance of understanding the experiences and challenges faced by others, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.
- **Collaboration (20.6%):** This suggests an understanding of the importance of teamwork and collective efforts in achieving common goals, particularly in the context of promoting diversity and gender equality.
- **Care (18.4%):** This indicates an understanding of the significance of empathy and compassion in fostering an inclusive environment where individuals feel valued and supported.
- **Humility (11.3%):** This hints at an understanding of the importance of acknowledging one's limitations and being open to learning from others, contributing to a more collaborative and inclusive workplace culture.

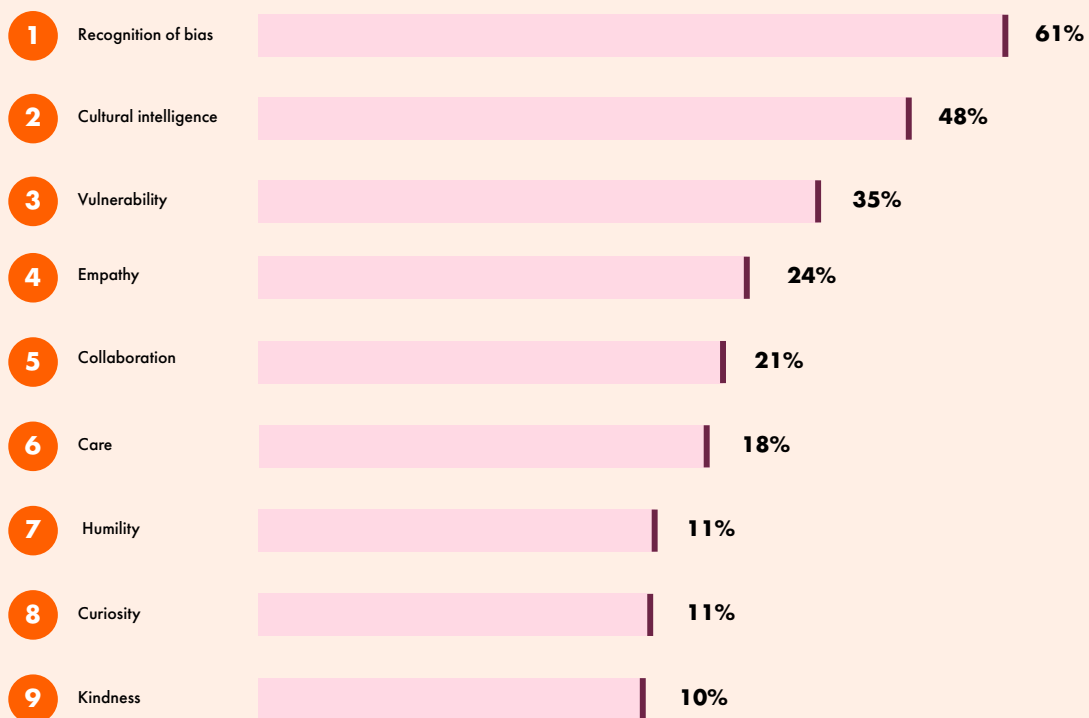
- **Curiosity (10.6%):** This suggests an acknowledgment of the importance of continuous learning and a willingness to understand diverse experiences and perspectives, contributing to a more inclusive and open-minded workplace culture.
- **Kindness (9.9%):** This reflects an understanding of the significance of compassion and consideration in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals feel respected and valued.

The miscellaneous responses highlight the significance of communication skills, active listening, proactive outreach, and raising awareness, all of which are essential components of effective and inclusive leadership in the context of promoting gender equality.

Overall, these results reflect the multifaceted understanding surveyed men have of what it takes to be an inclusive leader capable of fostering a workplace conducive to gender equality. The acknowledgment of the importance of these competencies indicates a growing awareness and commitment among men to actively contribute to the advance gender equality and inclusivity in the workplace.

WHICH OF THESE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES DO YOU STILL NEED TO WORK ON THE MOST?

(up to 3 answers allowed)



b. Advice to other men

When asked what advice the respondents would give to men in their organisation and beyond when it comes to committing to gender equality, four main types of actions emerged. 16% (22 respondents) encouraged men to **listen to women and be curious to engage in open discussions**. A close second, mentioned by 13% of those surveyed, focused on the recommendation to reflect on **one's biases** as well as **understand the position of power** men hold in society:



The first bit of advice is to accept that inequality exists - stop making excuses, or arguments that 'it's not as bad as people say'. Accept that it is [a] proven fact.

13% of respondents also emphasised the need to **educate oneself**, for example through readings, podcasts, videos or movies. Finally, 11% stressed the **benefits that gender equality brings to men themselves** as well as their wider environment such as their workplace:



A rising tide lifts all boats - helping women and being supportive will make the organization stronger and you a better leader.

Other recommendations included the need to start slowly, step by step; speaking up when confronted with sexism; creating space for others and also not feeling excluded or threatened by gender equality.

c. Sources of information and inspiration

Another question of the survey centered around the sources of information, research, books or articles (if any) that have had an impact on the respondents' gender equality, diversity and inclusion journey. 60% did not provide an answer, most certainly because the question was optional, and it could also indicate a lack of specific recommendations on the topic on the part of the respondents.

In the 56 responses, a wide variety of sources were cited, covering diverse formats. Still, a clear majority (37%) pointed to specific books, with some recurring authors and titles such as books written

by Bell Hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as well as **Invisible Women** by Criado-Perez and **White Fragility** by Robin DiAngelo.

Conversations are also considered a source of information, as well as the influence of family and partners (6 answers each). Social media, including LinkedIn (3 mentions), Youtube and Twitch are also platforms men use to inform themselves about gender equality, alongside podcasts (4 mentions). 5 respondents mentioned movies as good sources of information, referring specifically to the recent **Barbie** as an interesting one.

25% of the respondents did not point to a specific source, referring instead to unspecified books or articles, to their studies, or to “life” or “common sense” as good guidance.



IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

The organisational world, and indeed in many respects, our societies, are dominated by men: **we are in great need of gender balance¹ and equality²**. We are missing out on the diversity of thought and perspectives that comes with opening up our organisations and societies to those who are currently under-represented and marginalised. This should extend beyond gender, to encompass race, age, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other intersections of individual and collective identities that were beyond the scope of this particular survey.

Advancing gender equality is also clearly the right thing to do from a justice perspective. Younger generations in particular believe we need to change in order to meet the very real challenges of our times - and they are right.

As some 80% of leaders and 60% of line managers, men are in a powerful position to drive change. Research shows that when they engage in these efforts, they make a significant difference for the better. And while much remains to be done to involve men in the fight for a more (gender-) equal world, the findings of this survey signal that we are headed in the right direction. The men who responded to our survey showed a clear awareness of the myriad ways in which they can advance gender equality, and of the benefits these efforts bring to them and their organisations. Perhaps even more importantly, the depth and sophistication of many responses are testament to the men's interest in and dedication to the cause.

This survey builds on Robert Baker's previous work in this field and marks an important stepping stone in the Brussels Binder's efforts to engage more men in the fight for more diversity and gender

1 Gender balance calls for equal participation of women and men in all areas of work international and national staff at all levels, including at senior positions) and in programmes that agencies initiate or support. Achieving a balance in staffing patterns and creating a working environment that is conducive to a diverse workforce improves the overall effectiveness of our policies and programmes, and will enhance agencies' capacity to better serve the entire population (Source: [UNICEF](#)).

2 Gender equality represents the concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in the home, community and society. (Source: [UNICEF](#)).

equality, and to help men become inclusive leaders. We are grateful for the openness and honesty of the survey participants and will, in partnership with Robert Baker, use its findings to advance our work. We hope to be able to count on our growing network of male allies to accompany us on this journey.

Recommendations for allyship in professional life

If there is one thing this survey reveals, it is that there is not one “right” way to be a male ally. Yet following certain guidelines can help empower men to play a more meaningful role in promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion in their professional and personal lives.

From his work in this field, Rober Baker has helped us identify some best practices from organisations that have been successful in establishing allies networks and engaging men in gender equality. These are:

- 1. Ownership and engagement from the top:** Leaders understand and address their own biases, develop and articulate their vision, enable change and role model the key actions of inclusive leaders who are agents of change. They hold themselves accountable for progress.
- 2. Defining gender balance and equality as a key leadership competency:** Leaders recognise their need to be upskilled in gender balance and equality and see this as a key leadership and management competency.
- 3. Investment in events and programmes that drive change:** Organisations recognise the need to invest in engaging their men, especially the leaders, in diversity and inclusion efforts. This involves creating a coordinated strategy which can include workshops, events and leadership coaching, as well as running men’s groups.
- 4. Communication:** Organisations communicate clearly and regularly on the link between diversity and inclusion and organisational success, and keep employees updated on the actions the organisation is taking to drive change. Success is celebrated and communicated widely.
- 5. Supporting women’s leadership:** Encourage and support women in pursuing leadership positions and career advancement. Offer mentorship and advocate for their professional development.
- 6. Supporting women’s initiatives:** Participate in and support initiatives that promote women’s rights, such as advocacy campaigns, fundraisers, and community events that aim to empower women.

With the advent of International Men's Day on 19 November, organisations have a golden opportunity to engage their men on the issues that are important to them. A good first step is organising sessions for men internally to understand more about the issues men face in the workplace and at home. This can be a very effective catalyst to spur their involvement in wider gender equality initiatives.

Recommendations for allyship in personal life

Advocating for women's representation and rights should not be limited to the confines of a workplace. By adopting certain habits in your everyday life, you can become a valued ally to women and make the world a better place for generations to come. The process of becoming a better informed, more empathetic advocate for gender equality also fosters self-awareness and personal development. Consider the following tips:

- 1. Educate yourself:** Take the time to learn about the roots of the women's rights movement and the injustices and discrimination women face. There are ample books, articles, documentaries and workshops that can deepen your understanding of these issues. As you educate yourself, acknowledge and reflect on your own power and privileges - and how you can use them to support women and advance gender equality.
- 2. Listen to women:** Be willing to listen to the women in your circles in a way that inspires mutual trust and respect. Create a safe space for such exchanges and reflect on the experiences and challenges women share. Avoid dismissing or invalidating their feelings and ask how you can be of help.
- 3. Raise awareness:** While it is important to start with yourself, it is just as crucial to share your learnings and initiate (often tough) conversations with colleagues, friends and family. Raise awareness of women's struggle for equal rights, share their stories and perspectives, and encourage the men in your life to become allies.
- 4. Lift women up:** Amplify women's voices, give credit to women's ideas and contributions in conversations and meetings. If you notice women being interrupted or not given credit for their ideas, speak up and support them. Encourage women to share their perspectives and celebrate women's achievements.
- 5. Speak out:** When you witness sexism in whatever form (sexist language, "locker-room talk" or sexist jokes), gender-based violence, or discrimination against women, call it out! Challenge your own biases and those of others around you. Encourage discussions that promote gender equality and respect for all individuals.

- 6. Never stop:** Becoming a male ally requires a long-term commitment to advocating for gender equality. Learning about the personal and professional challenges of women may produce feelings of self-shame or self-blame that cause anxiety. The solution is more interaction and learning, not less. Continuously reflect on your beliefs and behaviours regarding gender equality and women's rights. Be open to learning and evolving your perspectives to become a stronger advocate for women.

The Brussels Binder and Robert Baker stand ready to support organisations and their leaders with this work of building male allyship. We believe strongly that by working together across all genders and intersections, we can accelerate progress towards gender equality, ultimately benefiting all of society.



Acknowledgements

Lead authors: Rodica Avornic, Robert Baker, Aimée Duprat-Macabies, Indre Krivaite

Contributors: Isabella Casella, Cassandra O'Connor, Margaux Plurien, Anna Zanetti

Data illustrations: Judit Bekker (juditbekker.com)

Layouting: Elza Lőw (elzalow.com)

Cover illustration: Lucien Leyh

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who made this survey and report possible. A heartfelt thank you to:

- The men who took the time to respond to the survey
- The Brussels Binder volunteers on the Male Allyship task force, responsible for the data analysis and the coordination and production of this report
- Robert Baker, who inspired the idea of the survey, shared his invaluable expertise, and contributed a large part of the final chapter of this report
- Judit Bekker, who created graphics to visually represent the findings of the survey
- Elza Lőw, who designed the layout for this report, adding a creative touch
- Google, who provided the venue and other support for the event to launch this report on 7 November 2023
- Friends of the Brussels Binder who provided feedback on a draft of this report



The Brussels Binder

www.brusselsbinder.com
contact@brusselsbinder.org



Robert Baker

robert@potentia-talent.com



Bibliography (and helpful resources)

Coxon, Annabel J. "6 Ways Gender Equality Is Good for Men." Global Women, 27 April, 2018. <https://globalwomen.org.nz/flexible-working/6-ways-gender-equality-is-good-for-men/#>.

Edwards, Aydon. "It's a Man's World: The Effect of Traditional Masculinity on Gender Equality." E-International Relations, 29 March 2015. <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/03/29/its-a-mans-world-the-effect-of-traditional-masculinity-on-gender-equality/>.

Flood, Michael. "'Toxic Masculinity': What Does It Mean, Where Did It Come from – and Is the Term Useful or Harmful?" The Conversation, 21 September 2022. <https://theconversation.com/toxic-masculinity-what-does-it-mean-where-did-it-come-from-and-is-the-term-useful-or-harmful-189298>.

Greenwood, Shannon. "Worldwide Optimism about Future of Gender Equality, Even as Many See Advantages for Men." Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, 30 April 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/30/worldwide-optimism-about-future-of-gender-equality-even-as-many-see-advantages-for-men/>.

Hauck, Carley. "Nine Tips for Being a Male Ally at Work," Greater Good, 19 May 2021. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine_tips_for_being_a_male_ally_at_work.

"How to Be an Ally to Women at Work." Femme Palette, 13 August 2023. <https://www.femmepalette.com/blog-posts/how-to-be-an-ally-to-women-at-work#>.

Howard, Jessica. "5 Ways Gender Equality Benefits Everyone." Canadian Women's Foundation, 21 September 2018. <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/5-ways-gender-equality-benefits-everyone/>.

Johnson, W. Brad. "How Men Can Become Better Allies to Women." Harvard Business Review, 12 October 2019. <https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-men-can-become-better-allies-to-women>.

Johnson, W. Brad and Smith, David G. "Male Allyship Is about Paying Attention." Harvard Business Review, 10 February 2021. <https://hbr.org/2021/02/male-allyship-is-about-paying-attention>.

Plan International. "What Is a Man's Role in Gender Equality Activism?," 22 March 2022. <https://plan-international.org/girls-get-equal/what-is-a-mans-role-in-gender-equality-activism/>.

Soken-Huberty, Emmaline. "7 Reasons Why Gender Equality Is Good For Everyone." Human Rights Careers, 16 April 2020. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/why-gender-equality-is-good-for-everyone/#>.

SurveyMonkey. "How to Analyze Survey Data: Methods & Examples | SurveyMonkey," n.d. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/how-to-analyze-survey-data/>.

UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. "9 Ways Men Can Become Allies for Equal Rights," 30 August 2020. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/9-ways-men-can-become-allies-for-equal-rights>.

UNFPA MENENGAGE. "7 Ways Men Can Be Better Allies for Gender Equality," 13 July 2020. <https://menengage.unfpa.org/en/news/7-ways-men-can-be-better-allies-gender-equality>.

"5 Qualitative Data Analysis Methods to Reveal User Insights," n.d. <https://www.hotjar.com/qualitative-data-analysis/methods/>.



THE
BRUSSELS
BINDER

The Brussels Binder

www.brusselsbinder.com
contact@brusselsbinder.org

