

Women in construction industry and men in day-care? Gender role attitudes of Luxembourg's youth

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The traditional division of labour between genders, where men function as breadwinners and women as homemakers and care takers, appeared during the industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century. In the 1960's, this traditional model started to be challenged as a result of female emancipation, the increasing educational attainment of women, the declining role of the traditional marriage and parenthood, the ageing process, a constantly increasing share of the service sector in national economies and consequently the growing female participation in the labour market¹. As a consequence, attitudes towards gender roles in industrialised countries have become less traditional over the last decades and over generations. Luxembourg is one of the European Union countries with the most dramatic increase in female labour market participation during the past decades, especially in part-time arrangements. The employment rate of women increased from 39% in 1983 to 57% in 2010 (Eurostat 2011). The question is whether and how this trend has affected the attitudes towards gender roles.

Here, we investigate current attitudes towards gender roles of a cohort of young people (15-28 years old residing in Luxembourg) based on data collected in the context of the 2009 wave of the Luxembourgish panel EU-SILC/PSELL-3. According to previous research, gender and age are the most important factors determining attitudes toward gender roles. To account for this, we split the analysis by gender and look at this 15-28 year cohort only. We focus on one particular aspect: the division of gender roles in the labour market and, more specifically, the gendered perceptions of occupations and professional capacities of women and men².

39% of young people in Luxembourg believe that both men and women are able to work in any profession – 7% think men are more capable than women and 17% believe women are more capable than men

Attitudes towards gender roles reflect beliefs that there are particular social roles (duties and rights) for which men and women are best suited. A general indicator for gender role attitudes in the labour market is the belief in equal capabilities of women and men in exercising a profession. We measure this belief by respondent's agreement or disagreement with the statement: "(Wo)Men are capable of exercising whatever occupation."

39% of Luxembourg's youth (15-28 year olds) believe that men and women are both able to exercise whatever profession. By

contrast, 37% have a rather "traditional" view and believe that neither women nor men are suited for all professions. Another 7% state that men are able to work in any kind of profession, while women are not. This group of 7% can be defined as "men-favouring". The remaining share of 17%, the "women favouring", believes that women are able, unlike men, to work in any profession. Why are there more young people believing in women's capabilities than in men's?

Young women in Luxembourg are proportionally more likely than young men to believe that women are able to exercise any profession

As shown in the table, young women believe in their own gender much more than in the opposite one: 60% of young women believe that women are capable of working in any profession while they are only 39% to express this view about men. Young men are more egalitarian in the sense that they are equally critical towards both women and men (52%).

Having met atypical role models influences men but not women

Social roles are internalised during the socialisation process, when people construct their gender identity. Being confronted with gender atypical role models in this process may create non-traditional role models for adolescents and young adults. So, let us check whether knowing women in typical male occupations (electrician, mechanist, foremen, computer scientist, researcher, chief executive officer) and men in traditionally female occupations (preschool teacher, secretary, house, receptionist, nurse, librarian) has an impact on the perception of the gender's professional capabilities. For this, counting the number of these atypical fields with which one is familiar, let us group this information into two broader categories: knowing persons in none or maximum one of these gender-atypical occupations versus knowing persons in two or more of these occupations.

On average, young people in Luxembourg know people working in four out of the twelve selected gender-atypical occupations. To check whether meeting such persons makes a difference with regard to gender role attitudes, we compare young people who have met none or only one person in an atypical profession with young people who have met workers in at least two such occupations. Meeting persons in gender-atypical professions apparently changes young men's – but not young women's – attitudes towards professional capabilities. In case of women's opinion towards the potential of women, one could argue that their attitude is already very positive. They have a very strong belief in their own gender, irrespective of how many atypical role models they have met (57% if they know women in no or only one of the 6 mentioned typically male professions versus 64% if they know women in 2 or more of the 6 mentioned typically male professions). On the other

¹ Valentová, M. (2011) *Social Cohesiveness and Gender Role Attitudes*. CEPS Working Papers, n° 2011-24.

² The analysed sample contains 836 respondents in this age group.

hand, they remain very critical towards men even if they have met men in many typically female jobs (42%). There is thus only a small – and insignificant – difference between women who met gender-atypical workers and those who did not. The situation is very different in the case of young men. Gender-atypical experiences increase by 17 points the percentage of favourable opinions vis-à-vis women (61% versus 44%) and by 19 points the percentage of favourable opinions vis-à-vis men (59% vs. 40%). Having met men or women in gender-atypical occupations increases their beliefs in the capabilities of the respective gender enormously.

Young people – and especially women – with Portuguese citizenship are more likely to have a positive attitude towards women’s and men’s professional capabilities than young people with Luxembourgish citizenship

Taking into consideration the citizenship, it is in fact Portuguese women who are very convinced about their own gender’s capabilities: 70% of Portuguese young women agree that

women can exercise whatever job, compared to 56% among Luxembourgish young women. Moreover, Portuguese young women are also more likely to trust men’s capabilities: 53% as opposed to 33% of Luxembourgish young women. Both men of Luxembourgish and Portuguese citizenship are more equally critically towards women’s and men’s capabilities compared with their female counterparts (the difference across the groups in their beliefs towards male and female capabilities are small and insignificant): 48% and 47% of young men with Luxembourgish citizenship believe that women and men respectively can exert whatever profession and 57% and 54% of Portuguese young men do so. In other words, young women and men of Portuguese citizenship – and in particular young women – are the most positive towards gender’s capabilities and they are somewhat more gender-neutral than the young Luxembourgish as they have the greatest shares of persons believing that both women and men are capable of doing whatever profession.

TABLE 1. Impact of knowing at least 2 persons in gender-atypical professions on attitudes towards gender roles

	Young women		Young men	
	% who agree that women are capable...		% who agree that women are capable...	
(a) Know women in no/one of the 6 mentioned typically male professions	57	60 (LU: 56 PT: 70)	 44*	52 (LU: 48 PT: 57)
(b) Know women in 2 or more of the 6 mentioned typically male professions	64			
	% who agree that men are capable...		% who agree that men are capable...	
(a) Know men in no/one of the 6 mentioned typically female professions	37	39 (LU: 33 PT: 53)	 40*	52 (LU: 47 PT: 54)
(b) Know men in 2 or more of the 6 mentioned typically female professions	42			

Source: EU-SILC/PSELL-3, 2009, CEPS/INSTEAD, STATEC.
Notes: N=836, weighted percentages, LU: Luxembourgish citizenship, PT: Portuguese citizenship. The differences between (a) and (b) are significant for young men (*), whereas these group differences for women are not significant.
Reading guide:
- Overall figures/averages (in bold): 60% of young women in Luxembourg state that women are capable of exercising whatever occupation (the remaining 40% do not believe that women are capable of doing whatever job). When looking at citizenship, 56% of young Luxembourgish women believe that women are capable of doing any job, compared to 70% of young Portuguese women.
- Breakdowns (a) and (b): (a) 57% of all young women in Luxembourg who have met women in none or only one of the typically male occupation listed think that women are capable of doing whatever job; (b) Out of those young women in Luxembourg who met women in at least 2 typically male occupations, 64% declare that women are capable of doing whatever job. There is thus only a small – and not statistically significant – difference between women who met gender-atypical workers and those who did not. For men, this difference is large (61%-44%=17 percentage points) and significant.

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Source de données

Le PSELL-3 (Panel Socio-Economique Liewen zu Lëtzebuerg) est une enquête qui a été lancée en 2003 auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population résidant au Luxembourg. Grâce à la méthodologie mise en oeuvre pour sa réalisation, les résultats issus de cette enquête effectuée auprès d'un échantillon initial de quelque 3500 ménages (9500 individus) constituent des estimations précises des chiffres concernant l'ensemble de la population. Le PSELL-3 est réalisé chaque année par le CEPS/INSTEAD, en collaboration avec le STATEC. Il s'inscrit dans le programme statistique EU-SILC de l'Union Européenne (European Union - Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) destiné à connaître les revenus et conditions de vie des personnes et des ménages dans les différents Etats membres.