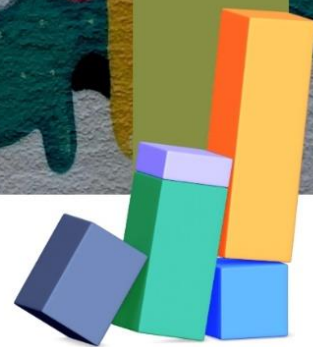


SEXIST ATTITUDES AMONG THE YOUTH AND ADOLESCENT POPULATION OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY. STUDY SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2024

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DEFENSORÍA
DEL PUEBLO
DEL PAÍS VASCO

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Authorship of baseline study: EDE Fundazioa

Date: September 2024

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE ARARTEKO

Gender equality is a universal legal principle, as well as a value and a goal for any democratic society. It is not only a fundamental human right, but it is also one of the cornerstones to build prosperous, sustainable and fair societies. The greater the equality, the greater the development of the quality of life of the citizens, as equality is a key tool to generate wellbeing and eliminate social and cultural exclusion. Therefore, promoting gender equality benefits society overall, men and women of all ages.

In recent decades, decisive steps have been taken to achieve the full legal recognition of formal equality, and progress made towards equality in citizen relations are undeniable. However, difficulties remain to achieve effective and material equality, and women continue to see the normal enjoyment of the rights in their daily lives to be seriously constrained. The pay gap, discrimination in widowhood pensions, greater pensions, a higher unemployment rate among women, the uneven presence of women in posts of economic, cultural, social and political responsibility, the lack of shared responsibility when it comes to care, and male violence against women are just some examples of it. Accordingly, the Ararteko is concerned about signs pointing to the perpetuation and acceptance of sexist patterns and conducts that were believed to be eradicated amongst the young. New generations embracing - from childhood and naturally - gender equality and respect is fundamental to advance towards an equal society.

Defending gender equality is an indisputable part of the remit of an institution such as the Ararteko in the scope of its work to oversee the public action subject to its control. The Ararteko believes that the mission of defending gender equality likewise includes defending the rights of women that have suffered violence from men. The Ararteko has taken up this role in practice in the framework of its supervisory powers of the actions of the Basque public authorities, by means of a specific work area - called the *Women's Equality and Integrity Area* - and by cooperating with institutions operating in that area in the Basque Country. Therefore, as an essential part of the mission entrusted to the Ararteko - to defend gender equality and to fight against sex discrimination - the Ararteko likewise strives to promote and drive that essential human right. To this end, the intention is to address the problem of sexist attitudes among the youth of the Basque Country, in order to establish proposals for improvement based on effective knowledge of the situation.

This document sets out the results of the **study on sexist attitudes among the youth of the Basque Country**; the study was entrusted to EDE Fundazioa and a citizen forum was conducted by the Ararteko to contrast and enrich its findings. This research work has allowed the Ararteko to better understand this phenomenon and extract a series of conclusions, in order to use them as a basis for recommendations to improve public policies in this area.

More specifically, this research work offers:

- A description of the main quantitative data available on sexist attitudes of adolescents and young people, along with their positioning regarding values linked to gender equality in general, and male violence against women in particular, and stressing the gender differences.
- A qualitative analysis of the different stereotypes associated to gender that underlie the opinions and attitudes of Basque adolescents and young people, considering different

scopes and dimensions (family relationships, couple relationships, professional and educational pathways, relationships in the digital environment, etc.).

- An invitation to reflect on the relationship established between different factors that perpetuate male violence against adolescent and young women.
- A brief overview of the lessons learnt that can be extracted from some of the education initiatives for the youth and adolescent population aimed at raising awareness of and preventing male violence against women.
- A summary of the reflections and discussions at the "Sexist Attitudes of Basque Youth" citizen forum, that the Ararteko held in Bilbao on 22 May 2024.

I would like to publicly express my sincere recognition and gratitude to EDE Fundazioa research team for their rigorous work in preparing this study. I would also like to thank all the young people who have taken part in the field work on which the study was based - whether by answering questionnaires or as part of the discussion groups - for their invaluable support. I would particularly like to mention the contribution of the young people who are the current members of the Ararteko Young Adviser's Council. Finally, I would like to sincerely thank everybody who - voluntarily and generously - took part in the citizen forum during which the findings of this study were discussed; they thus contributed to the analysis of a rich and diverse view of an active and committed citizenry. This work would not have been possible without all those contributions.

Manuel Lezertua Rodríguez

Ararteko – Ombudsman of the Basque Country

2. DEFINING THE SUBJECT OF STUDY

When defining the subject of study, which focuses on **adolescents and young people**, the definition in the Youth Act 2/2022, of 10 March, was used and which establishes that a young person is anybody aged between 12 and 30 years old, both inclusive. In any event, the decision was taken to keep the subject of study to young people between 14 and 29 years old for the purpose of this study. Accordingly, it is important to consider the notes in the following section of the methodology, where the different age brackets considered in relation to each of the applied research techniques are set out, together with the clarifications included throughout the analysis.

In line with the definition coined by the Council of Europe¹, sexism refers to attitudes and behaviour based on the idea that a person or group of people is inferior on the basis on their gender. However, this study has opted to focus the analysis on the **attitudes**, given the interest in generating useful knowledge to **prevent discriminatory and sexist behaviour**.

More specifically, it is of interest to pay attention to patriarchal sexist attitudes. As already mentioned, when we refer to **sexist attitudes** in this study, we are referring to attitudes that are discriminatory or prejudicial against women, either explicitly or subtly, based on the idea that, as a group, they are inferior to men and are relegated to certain roles with lower value and social recognition. They are attitudes that perpetuate the structural inequality of men and women, keep alive the oppression and submission of women at all levels (sexual, reproductive, work, emotional...) and are the breeding ground of violence against women

Therefore, in addition to gathering information on the attitudes of adolescents and young people, data has also been collected on their opinions and **positioning** regarding equality and male violence against women.

It should be clarified that the decision was taken to leave out of this study other types of sexism such as lesbophobia and homophobia, with their hostile attitudes towards and discrimination against people whose homosexual orientation questions the patriarchal social order regarding homosexuality. It is also a theme on which the Ararteko has wanted to dedicate another specific study.²

In so far as the focus has been on **relationships between men and women**, when we talk about discrimination and power dynamics in this study, it is important to consider that we are referring to this specific framework, which is also often the framework of heterosexual emotional-sexual relationships.

Therefore, a distinction has been made between two main dimensions when embarking on the analysis: that of gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes, and the aspect of positioning regarding equality and male violence against women.

¹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2019). Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 27 March on preventing and combatting sexism.

² Study of the Ararteko on the hate discourse and attitudes against LGTBI in the Basque Country (still in the pipeline at the time of writing).

The content of the first of the dimensions has been grouped around two sub-dimensions: gender stereotypes and social pressure, and couple dynamics and sexuality. The content of the second aspect have been grouped according to their association with three themes: gender equality and sex discrimination; male violence against women; and equality policies and feminism.

The following table relates the specific analysis sub-dimensions and categories included in each aspect:

DIMENSION 2: POSITIONING AS REGARDS EQUALITY AND MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN	
SUB-DIMENSIONS	CATEGORIES
3. Gender equality and sex discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning and identification with values linked to equality • Perception of the degree of equality in society • Valuation of equality (importance) • Identification of specific inequalities (areas) • Intersectionality • Experiences of discrimination (areas) • Valuation of discrimination (importance) • Justification of sexism
4. Male violence against women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of different types of violence • Recognition of violence through ICTs, pornography... • Perception of the evolution of the prevalence of violence • Assessment of different situations (importance/severity) • Perception of associated factors (causes) • Stereotypes and justifying violence • Opinion regarding the relationship between violence and equality • Reaction to violence • Acceptability/Punishability • Recognised influences in their idea of violence (messages received and from whom)
5. Equality policies and feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities • Assessment of the quotas and other positive action measures • Perception of the feminist movement • Participation in feminist initiatives
DIMENSION 1: GENDER STEREOTYPES AND SEXIST ATTITUDES	
SUB-DIMENSIONS	CATEGORIES
1. Gender stereotypes & social pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics that define women and men (feminine & masculine) • Professional attributions to women and men • Other (sports, family relations, etc.) • Attitudes regarding the distribution of household and care work • Future plans regarding the distribution of household and care work • Prevalence of the stress of the gender role or identity pressure • Self-esteem • Attitudes regarding new masculinities
2. Couple relationships and sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning of the couple • Meaning of sexuality • Values of the ideal partner • Importance and distribution of roles • Stereotypes regarding couple relations • Assessment of sexual-emotional education

3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for this project combines qualitative and quantitative techniques that has allowed the different goals to be met, both regarding **describing** the reality, and identifying factors that impact it, and **delving further** in some of those factors.



The first phase involved a **documentary review**. The main documents and bibliography references of interest in keeping with the subject of study of the research (research from other territorial scopes, reports, legislation...) were compiled and reviewed. On the one hand, this allowed the research to be contextualised and the analysis framework to be established; along with identifying the analysis dimensions and sub-dimensions and steering the design of the tools to gather information and identify the key reports in this area. The annex to the report contains a list of the main documentary references examined.

The documentary review has also allowed initiatives to be identified that are connected to raising awareness about equality and to preventing male violence against women, aimed at young people, both in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and in other territorial scopes. That then allowed pointers or guidance to be considered in the intervention. The main documents included can be consulted in the section of the report on this aspect.

At a second stage, **secondary quantitative data sources** were consulted and used to estimate the prevalence of sexist opinions and attitudes among the youth population, as well as to observe possible differences according to certain sociodemographic variables (sex, age...). The age range covered by those studies is 13 to 29.

Different criteria—including the reliability of the source, the territorial scope in question, the appropriateness of the indicators and the analysis categories predetermined when defining the subject of study, and the publication date— were combined to select the data finally included in the analysis. Priority was given to the territorial scope coinciding with the BAC, the source being of acknowledged robustness and that it had been recently published. The main data sources consulted are listed at the start of each section.

It should be noted that some constraints were found when identifying and selecting quantitative data. One of the main difficulties is the lack of data disaggregated by sex and age. The consulted studies do not always provide data disaggregated by both variables; not many studies at the level of the BAC were identified and we therefore opted to take works in other territorial contexts, generally in Spain, as references.

Third, quantitative information was gathered by means of an **online questionnaire** aimed at young people aged 15 to 29 and resident in the BAC. The questionnaire mainly sought to identify

content in order to design the dynamics of the group sessions. In total, 279 responses were collected³.

Finally, different **discussion groups** were conducted with young people to go further into the discourse on possible youth sexist attitudes. Specifically, **four mixed discussion groups of men and women** were organised. Each of those groups was conducted in one of the provinces of the Basque Country and was aimed at a specific age bracket, thus guaranteeing that the conversations took place between people of a similar age bracket and different to that of the other groups.

The people were selected for three of those groups using non-probability sampling, based on opinion, known as judgemental sampling. In the opinion samples, the research team selects those people who are considered as the most appropriate due to their better knowledge of or importance in the problem to be researched, and those who self-identify as better respondents.

The participants in each of these three groups had a varied profile, not only based on sex and age but also on other variables, such as the size of the municipality of residence and the country of origin. The sessions lasted around 2.5 hours.

As regards the fourth group, the decision was taken to use an existing work group, as is the case of the **Ararteko Children and Young People's Council**, made up of young people aged between 14 and 17. The involvement of this group in work process was judged to be positive as it is a stable group, with young people who already knew each other and were used to working together, which facilitates approaching and delving further into some subjects.

Given the age of the participants, four specific work dynamics were designed for this session. The first two dynamics, along with the last, or closing one, were conducted in mixed groups where the adolescent women and men worked together. In the case of the third - and most extensive - dynamic, non-mixed work groups were set up, divided by gender, with the intention of generating a safe reflection space where people would express themselves fluently and at ease, avoiding politically correct discourse or moderated by the presence of the other gender. This session lasted 4 hours.

The following tables sets out more detailed information on the sample of participants in those four groups:

	Date	Place	Age bracket	Ages	Women	Men	Total
GROUP 1	22/05/2023	Bilbao	22-29 years old	22 years old (2 people)	4	3	7
				23 years old (1 person)			
				26 years old (2 people)			
				27 years old (1 person)			
				29 years old (1 person)			

³ The tool and the questionnaire results can be found in the Annexes.

SEXIST ATTITUDES AMONG THE YOUTH AND ADOLESCENT POPULATION OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY

GROUP 2	23/05/2023	Donostia / San Sebastián	17-21 years old	17 years old (2 people) 19 years old (1 person) 20 years old (3 people) 21 years old (1 person)	3	4	7
GROUP 3	29/05/2023	Vitoria-Gasteiz	22-29 years old	22 years old (1 person) 23 years old (1 person) 24 years old (2 people) 28 years old (2 people) 29 years old (1 person)	4	3	7
GROUP 4	04/06/2023	Zarautz	14-17 years old	14 years old (5 people) 15 years old (4 people) 16 years old (7 people) 17 years old (7 people)	14	9	23
TOTAL					25	19	44

Therefore, a total of **44 young people aged between 14 and 29** took part in the work groups.

The groups were led by an **intergenerational team of women and men** that facilitated the rapport or connection. The sessions were approached with **open scripts and were adapted** to the age of the participants⁴.

In keeping with this methodological approach, qualitative information gathered from the discussion groups with young people of the BAC - held expressly in the framework of this study - was combined with quantitative information from prior baseline studies in the subject in order, to perform the analysis, whose results are contained in this report.

⁴ All the tools used to collect information can be consulted in the Annex.

4. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN IDEAS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Gender stereotypes and social pressure

1.1 What characteristics do young people associate with femininity and masculinity? Which stereotypes persist?

- The traditional mindsets regarding masculinity and femininity that continue to be present in society are also held by young people to a great extent. Even though some stereotypes are considered to no longer be so widespread, the young people clearly distinguish the traits that they consider to be more typical of one sex or the other; the views of what is feminine, and masculine tend to be at odds, meaning that there are different expectations as regards one of the sexes.
- The perception of men has greater weight in the popular consciousness. From that point of view, femininity is seen to be strongly assimilated with the realm of sentiment and emotion, compared to the idea of masculinity that is much further away from that sphere. It seems that men's perception and projection of what a woman is or should have greater weight in the popular consciousness than what women think about themselves.
- Young men consider the emotional world of women to be excessively complex and they usually consider it to have a negative connotation. Young men do not perceive their difficulties to handle the emotional terrain as something negative, but rather to the contrary, they believe it to be a great practical value.
- Even though they do not represent the majority, young people were also found who question these gender norms and adopt critical and dissident postures as regards the dominant femininity and masculinity.
- In practice, young people must deal with the same gender stereotypes as always, but they are more aware—at least in theory—that those stereotypes exist.

1.2 Which gender stereotypes do young people identify in the sport, educational and professional fields?

- When giving their input, the young people stressed that the gender mandates in education and the workplace have been gradually overcome in recent years; however, the data show that the professional and employment pathways segregated by sex continue to exist. To give one example, young women accounted for 77% of students enrolled in Health Sciences compared to 29% in Engineering and Architecture during the 2022/2023 academic year. However, young people, particularly young men, often perceive it as something related to personal preferences and qualities, and less so to gender mandates.
- In the educational field, teachers seem to unconsciously reproduce sexist stereotypes with their practices and behaviour, reinforcing the conduct conventionally attributed to each sex.
- The participation of young women at school, particularly the youngest of them, is frequently limited by fear of being the object of comments or ridicule by the young men.
- Young people continue to perceive the world of sport and its surrounding values as one of the areas where gender stereotypes are most strongly present.

1.3 What do young people think about jointly sharing housework and care tasks?

- The imbalance in the distribution of household and care tasks is also repeated among the younger population. In 2019, the average time that young women residing in Spain spent on household and care tasks was around 2 hours and 24 minutes compared to the 1 hour and 48 minutes by young men. The older they get, and the life moment changes, the distance in the time spent by men and women increases significantly.
- However, young women are not fully aware of the gender gap in the care role and the distributing of household work; young men, in particular, believe that that breach is a thing of the past.
- Many of the traits attributed to women have a positive connotation (they are understanding, affectionate, accommodating...), but those traits are also used to justify that women should take on more of the caring.
- They consider that the birth of children is one of the main milestones that most clearly trigger the taking up of traditional gender roles. They believe that is when women start to take on more disproportionate responsibility for the care work at home, as - in their opinion - society presupposes that women are the ones that can best cover the care needs in the family.

1.4 How do young people feel pressurised? On what aspects is that pressure focused?

- Even though there are few differences between girls and boys as regards the greater social pressure that some mention as regards the imperative not to disappoint and to be successful at work and in their studies, it is true that, in general, young women feel clearer social pressure than young men in terms of being physically attractive (46.3% of young women feel pressurised in that aspect) from very early ages and, subsequently, with respect to their role as mother. While pressure on young men is greater as regards success, power and achievement (28.1% of young men feel greater pressure with respect to "being successful at hooking up").
- Worrying about their physical appearance and image has increased in recent years to the point of becoming one of the main pressure points for youth in general and, in particular, during adolescence and for young women. The widespread use of the social network has exacerbated that social pressure.
- The pressure that young women usually experience due to the socially imposed expectations and beauty standards (aesthetic violence) is much more overwhelming and has an important impact on their self-worth. The portrayal of women in the media, advertising, fashion, etc. is highly sexualised and eroticized, and they are constantly being told that their physical appearance is their biggest asset.
- In the case of women, expectations are placed on their ability to be pleasant and accommodating, both regarding their physical aspect and emotional world. By contrast, the tenets of traditional hegemonic masculinity expect young men to experience a limited range of emotions and social pressure conditions them to be seen as strong, decisive, sexually active and brave.
- Even though young people consider that there has been a positive evolution with respect to previous generation and a certain opening up in the mandates to new ways of expressing masculinities, the stigma attached to transgressing heteronormative mandates seems to still have a strong "corrective" influence. In 2022, one out of every four young men residing in Spain said they agreed that "real men are heterosexuals" compared to 10.1% of young women.

2. Couple dynamics and sexuality:

2.1 How important do young people think it is to be in a couple? What type of couple do they have in mind? How do they see the future as regards the couple?

- No clear position is seen regarding the importance that young people give to being in a couple and there has been a slight drop in its relevance in recent years. Most young people believe that current couple dynamics are more diverse and flexible compared to the typical couple model of previous generations. Greater openness and familiarity can be seen with different types of relationships, which include same sex couples, open relationships, non-monogamous relationships, and other variations.
- However, it seems that the preference for the traditional couple has recently risen (in 2021, 86.3% of young women and 78.2% of young men in Spain opted for this type of couple). In practice, the couple archetypes (heterosexual couple with children) seem to continue to be seen largely as the "normality" in this respect, as despite the aforementioned openness regarding different relationships, they seem to be met with greater scepticism when embarking on life projects in common. Thus, for example, three out of ten young Spaniards consider that "open relationships never work out".
- The older they get, the more the lack of a stable partner and/or children begins to result in social pressure. Social judgement for not complying with what society expects at this stage of life is even greater on young women, who are presumed to have an innate interest in marriage and motherhood.
- Even though the prospect of having a partner with a view to the future remains, the couple dynamics are no longer seen as a relationship that should be lifelong, which means that they consider separation as something natural if necessary. This is a radical change on former times.

2.2 What does it mean to young men and young women to have a partner? With what ideas or values do they associate being in a couple? What stereotypes come into play in these relationships?

- There is consensus among young people about the idea of being in a couple to share enjoyment; however, young women in particular value the emotional aspects and shared experience of the couple (having fun, trust, the possibility to shared interests and future plans), while young men give greater value to those aspects related to sexual attraction and compatibility between the members of the couple.
- In general, young people opt not to lose their individual independence when they enter a relationship. Far more young women speak about keeping it. In 2017, 72.4% of them considered it essential compared to 55.8% of young men.
- Even though the majority of young women and men tend to support independence within the couple, some myths of romantic love can still be found among young people in the framework of heterosexual couples; they perpetuate the unequal roles and the imbalances of power that favour the position of men over women and are used to justify some of the sexist behaviour linked to control in the couple. Thus, the idea persists of men as protectors (in 2021, 41.8% of young men and 25.6% of young women in Spain still thought so); jealousy as an expression of love (27.9% and 14.9% respectively). or being completely wrapped up in the couple (34% and 26.4%) are matters accepted by and acceptable to a minority of young people. Nevertheless, young women appear to

be rather less conservative. These myths - like all stereotypes - are permeated from early ages, when critical capacity and life experience are less developed.

2.1 How important do young people think sexuality is? What does sex mean to them? What stereotypes are found in this regard?

- In general, young people consider sex to be something natural that forms part of the human condition and above all fulfils a function related to enjoying one's own body and other bodies. Therefore, their way of understanding sexuality is very different to that of previous generations.
- They give great importance to sexual relations, which is particularly true in the case of young men (in 2015, 66% of young men and 45% of young women in Spain considered it to be very important), but the expectations of the two genders differ. Young women consider that both people getting pleasure, along with safety and prevention to be fundamental aspects of sexuality, while young men prioritise matters related to sexual compatibility.
- Even though open-mindedness prevails, the roles as regards sexuality in heterosexual relations continue to be greatly differentiated and are in line with well-demarcated gender stereotypes, such as the expectation for women to be willing to adapt and satisfy the desires of the other party and to accept greater responsibility regarding protection and contraception.
- Women are more commonly seen to give more emotional importance to sexual relations that goes beyond purely physical pleasure; while young men link the sexual act to satisfying an instinct and that there may or may not be emotional aspects involved.
- It should be noted that a new sexual moral has been gaining strength in recent years; it fosters a shift towards a new "norm" or gender mandate, according to which women must "break free" and separate sex and love. Many young women have adopted this new behaviour that *a priori* is presented as liberation for women, but which, ultimately, does not consider the satisfying of their needs or desires so much as encouraging them to see sex from a more "masculine" optics that better serves men's aspirations.

2.4 What type of sexual and emotional education does young people receive?

- Internet is currently the main sources of sex information for young people (in 2019, 47.8% of Spanish youth mentioned it), followed closely by friends (45.5%) and, lagging some way behind, from teachers (28%). Girls resort more to friends and boys to Internet.
- Even though there have been advances, families consider playing a secondary role in this field. In any event, they are more like to ask their mother (23.1%) than their father (12.4%).
- Young people have usually received formal and specific sex education at school (in 2019, 72% of young people residing in Spain said they had done), but this training may not be covering their needs due to a lack of an adequate comprehensive approach. Young women are particularly critical in this regard (74.5% of girls said they did not consider it sufficient compared to 62.6% of boys).
- The shortfall in educational guidance facilitates Internet having an ever more important role in the emotional and sex education of young people; more specifically, that is true of pornography which young people are accessing at ever earlier ages and the consumption of pornography can be seen to be greater in the older age bracket. In 2023, 71.6% of young people aged between 25 and 29 residing in Spain had consumed porno in the last year.

- Two out of every three young people access pornographic content, and young men consume 20% more than young women. Such content inspires and influences their sexual relations.
- A significant part of the youth population, particularly young women, is aware that some of the pornographic content is violent (in 2023, 48.2% of young women in Spain considered it to be so compared to 32.4% of young men), discriminate against women 84.8.2% and 32.4%, respectively) and can have a toxic impact on their sexual relations.

3. Gender equality and sex discrimination:

3.1 What do young people understand by gender equality? How much importance do they give to it? What degree of gender equality do young people perceive? How do they believe it has evolved in recent years?

- In general, young people can be said to consider gender equality an important topic, even though young women show greater interest in the issue than young men do. In 2020, around eight out of ten Spanish young women showed great interest in this issue, compared to six out of ten young men. Young people can be seen to highly identify with the value of gender equality (around 85% of young women and 70% of young men identify with this value), which is not the case with feminism.
- The degree of gender equality that Basque youth perceive exists in our society is rather higher than by other age groups. They are more optimistic. In 2021, Spanish youth scored this topic an average of 6.2 out of 10 compared to 5.8 by society overall.
- Young people believe that the degree of equality achieved in society overall is not the same as the one that exists among young people. In general, they believe there is greater equality among young people; however, young women are far more critical about this issue and the gap between what they and young men perceive has increased in recent years.
- Some young people associate the gender inequality in our society with the misconception that it is the result of the arrival of people from other countries, who have other less equal cultures or customs than ours (*purple-washing*).

3.2 What degree of sex discrimination do young people perceive? Where? To what extent have young people experienced discrimination?

- In general, the youth population believes that sexist situations are more to do with the behaviour of older generations than with their own, and they are clear about the idea that the situation has improved.
- This hinders the raising of awareness about the structural nature of this type of discrimination. However, at least at the level of what they express, young women seem to be set apart from the men, are more aware and show greater rejection of the different sex discrimination situations than young men do.
- Despite their lack of experience in the workplace, young people consider it to be one of the areas of life where more sex discrimination situations occur in our society. Social media and politics are other areas of discrimination that young people identify as disproportionately affecting women.
- In recent years, the proportion of young people that report having felt discriminated due to gender has increased. In 2021, 72.4% of young women residing in Spain and 57% of young men had felt discriminated against on grounds of gender.

- They most suffer sex discrimination situations in the street or in nightlife venues and the social media, a space where the discrimination is intensifying and whose relevance has increased significantly in recent years, particularly among young people. In 2019, 20.7% of young Spanish women said they had felt discriminated online, while the percentage had risen to 28.8% by 2021.
- Given how commonplace it has become, young people minimise the importance of some more subtle forms of sexism and male violence against women (looks, comments).

4. Male violence against women:

4.1 What perception do young people have of male violence against women which affects our society? What forms do they identify and how serious do they consider them?

- Most young people acknowledge male violence against women as a major social problem. However, the differences by sex are very significant and young women are much clearer about it than young men are. In 2021, 75% of young women and 50.4% of young men in Spain categorised such violence as very serious. Young women's concern about this problem has increased in recent years, while the opposite trend has been observed among young men.
- The same importance is not attributed to all forms of violence against women, and some are even trivialised. It is worrying that some young people say that it is something that has always happened; that it is "inevitable" in certain contexts; etc. In 2021, one out of four young men residing in Spain (24,4%) considered that this violence "has always existed, it is inevitable", compared to 14.7% of young women.
- Significant difficulties to detect expressions of this violence continue to be found; difficulties that are greater among adolescents. Above all, the forms of violence confined to the area of sexual violence, coercive control or that exercised through the Internet go undetected. Young people's intense use of social media and Internet make them particularly vulnerable to this form of violence.
- Some young men believe that men are unprotected against the violence they suffer (in 2022, 52.2% of young Spanish men so stated) and against false allegations (47.2%), which strengthens a collective vision where men are victims.

4.2 Which factors do young people believe influence male violence against women? Which stereotypes around this problem are most present?

- Young women are clearer than young men that male violence against women is above all related to structural factors such as the patriarchal system (in 2021, 37.2% of young Spanish women so stated compared to 14.2% of young men) and gender inequality (33.4% and 17.4%, respectively). In recent years, the awareness of young women has increased in this regard, though not so much in the case of young men.
- A notable drop can be seen in the scope of misconceptions about the attackers and the women victims of gender-based violence (woman's fault, attacker mentally ill). Nonetheless, young people continue to take on board some of those false notions.

5. Equality policies and feminism

5.1 How do young people rate the equality measures?

- Young people widely support many of the measures to foster gender equality that have been implemented. However, a significant percentage of young people consider that personal merit and not positive discrimination quotas should be the prevailing criterion to access employment and professional development. In 2021, 35.9% of young women and 38.4% of young men residing in Spain considered that "no law should favour women as a formula to achieve equality".
- Gender quotas or equity quotas are measures that have the worst press because the idea is widespread - particularly among men, but also among some women - that such measures lead to unfair situations for men.

5.2 What do young people think about feminism? What is their position regarding the feminist movements? What does feminism mean to them?

- In general terms, the position of young people seems to be closer to feminism than that of the population, even though young women are much more robust when describing themselves as feminists than men are. In 2020, just over half of the young women of the Basque Country considered themselves to be very feminist (53.2%), while the percentage of young men who felt so was 32.1%. However, the concept of feminism is not as widely embraced or as accepted as that of equality, particularly among young men.
- A certain distancing has been noted with respect to feminism in recent years, which is related to the fact that many young men feel "targeted" by the movement. They believe that some demands are going too far, and the feminist discourse blames all men and subverts their presumption of innocence, which unsettles them and makes them feel unprotected. This argument is particularly widespread among young men, but it is also shared by some young women.
- A very diverse collection of virtual spaces has mushroomed online, and which expose openly sexist and misogynist messages aimed to discredit the feminist movement (*manosphere*).

5. SUMMARY OF THE CITIZEN FORUM

On 22 May 2024, the Ararteko organised, in Bilbao, the citizen forum on “Sexist Attitudes Among the Youth and Adolescent Population of the Basque Country”; the aim was for young people and experts to discuss the initial findings of the field work conducted as part of this study. Those reflections, along with the other conclusions and ideas set out throughout this report, have also inspired the assessments and proposals in the last section of this document.

The group dynamics and the thematic hubs discussed are set out below:

1.1. Group dynamics:

- *The participants were asked to reflect on and discuss a series of ideas extracted from the results of the study commissioned by the Ararteko from the EDE Fundazioa, about the sexist attitudes among the adolescent and youth population of the Basque Country.*
- *The goal of the 4 discussion groups was to create spaces to reflect, in which to gauge the opinion and proposals that those ideas or thematic hubs elicit among the group participants (young people and/or people knowledgeable or involved in this area).*
- *The Ararteko would use the main content of these discussions to set out a series of conclusions and proposals to be able to advance in the measures and public policies to allow the fostering of better social discourse and attitudes of Basque youth around gender equality.*
- *The composition of the groups was based on the varied background of the participants (young adults, adolescents, feminist voluntary sector, experts or professionals in the field, child and youth association), which ensured the richness of the debate, with different points of view due to that diverse background and experience.*
- *The groups were led by the EDE Fundazioa and the rapporteur was the Ararteko.*

1.2. Thematic hubs discussed by the groups

- **PROMOTING THE VALUE OF EQUALITY:** Giving impetus to clarifying the meaning of gender equality, promoting an understanding of this notion that **benefits everyone and not just women**. Disseminating and making the widespread point that gender equality as a core social value **drives social and economic development, improves individual developments** —it makes us more fulfilled, more capable, more evolved and advanced humans —, and **expands, in short, the social and individual potential**. (Group1)
- **WORKING FOR COOPERATIVE EQUALITY AND BASED ON PARTNERSHIPS:** The path to follow (the work methodology) to achieve equality must prioritise **cooperation and partnerships between women and men**. Only cooperation - and not confrontation - will allow **universal recognition of the results of** that work for equality to be achieved. **Segregation spaces** may be of interest to **forge empowerment**, both of women and of men, but the work, ultimately, must be perceived as a **joint undertaking**. (Group1)

- **ELIMINATING SEXIST STEREOTYPES:** Promoting from childhood - and particularly as youths - an **idea of the whole human being, not fragmented into stereotypes**, which allows **all their potential and abilities to be developed beyond gender stereotypes**. Learning about the history and the reasons for the present existence of sexist stereotypes and making progress in overcoming them to consolidate a concept of a whole human being for women and men, able to develop all the potential or attributes that are stereotypically assigned to only one of the sexes. (Group2)
- **GIVING NEW MEANING TO THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES ATTRIBUTED TO WOMEN AND UNDERSTANDING THEIR SOCIAL POTENTIAL:** Strengthening the measures aimed at disseminating and getting across the point of messages that recognise and **highlight the attributes traditionally associated with femininity, as core aspects for the wellbeing and sustainability of society** (the value of care, emotiveness, empathy...; social recognition as well of the professions that, linked to those values, have been traditional the remit of women), encouraging **their acceptance as universal value** that men can, must and want to cultivate as well. (Group2)
- **REVISING THE PREVAILING CONCEPT OF SEXUALITY AMONG SOME YOUNG PEOPLE:** educating children and disseminating among young people an **equal notion of human sexuality that respects people's dignity** (particularly, dealing with the proliferation of mindsets among young people that see sexuality as an expression of violence and as an expression of inequality). Addressing the problem of the use of **pornography, as a way of learning about sexual relations**, and the **increase in sexual violence among young people**, not just men against women, fostering measures that meet the need for sexual-emotional education). (Group 3)
- **UNDERSTANDING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS THE LAST RESORT OF SEXIST VALUES:** disseminating an understanding of **gender-based violence as the last and cruellest link of the inequality and devaluing of women**. Getting the message over that without sexism there is no violence against women and girls for the fact of being so, and that **the only effective way to end male violence against women is to overcome gender equality**. Building on the opportunity that the **digital space provides to educate** or give positive messages about equality, while remembering that it is also the **first channel where male violence is expressed against women**, and where the intensity of the violence is also greater. (Group 4)

6. CONTENT AND GUIDELINES FOR ACTION RECOMMENDED TO THE BASQUE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN THE FULFILMENT OF THEIR DUTY TO FOSTER EQUALITY AMONG CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

This final section sets out the most important conclusions from the findings of the analysis carried out throughout this document; they can be associated with the weaknesses and opportunities of the observed reality and are used to **make recommendations, as guidelines, that the Ararteko addresses to all Basque public authorities, in an attempt to provide the public initiatives aimed at fostering equality among children, adolescents and young people with content that answers the problems and to overcome the real obstacles observed in this analysis and which ultimately impact the effectiveness of such public measures.**

As has already been indicated above, gender equality is an essential value, enshrined in our legal system as a principle and as a human right, whose negative aspect involves the right of everyone not to be discriminated on the grounds of sex. As confirmed by the main findings of this study, despite the equality proclaimed by the legal system, the reality shows that women (and also girls when they are children and adolescents, and young women) are not in a position of equality with respect to their fellow male citizens, and face real obstacles in their daily life, to a great extent down to the gender stereotypes and roles that relegate them to a position of inferiority and less value or social recognition with respect to men. Ultimately, those sociocultural patterns generate male violence against women.

In order to eliminate the obstacles preventing gender equality from being an effective and material reality, **all Basque public administrations are required - each in the scope of their respective powers - to pursue policies and measures in order to achieve real and effective equality, whose legal grounds lie in the Gender Equality and Lives Free of Male Violence Against Women Act ([Legislative Decree 1/2023, of 16 March, approving the consolidated text of that legislation](#)).** Those measures and initiatives must **be aimed at training, educating and raising awareness of the population to eliminate sexist stereotypes and patterns, and to generate far-reaching social changes to end the prejudices, customs, traditions and practices that stem from women being considered inferior and subordinate to men.**

The institution of the **Ararteko reminds Basque public authorities of their duty - each in the scope of their respective powers —to undertake training, education or awareness-raising measures and initiatives for children and young people—** as well as for the adults involved in their education and socialisation processes- aimed at stressing the value of gender equality to Basque children and young people, as well as to eliminate the persistent underlying sexist value.

All the Basque public administrations (each in the scope of their respective powers) are therefore recommended to consider the following content and guidelines, when

implementing education or training programmes and initiatives, and awareness campaigns about equality, aimed at children and young people:

1. Instilling new meaning to the value of feminism as a theory that frees and benefits women and men and explaining gender equality as a common goal for women and men.

- Mention should be made of such disparate positioning of the youth population regarding feminism and gender equality. While the value of equality is widely accepted among that generation, feminism has not managed to connect with a good many young people, particularly young men. They commonly associate the feminist movement with slogans and messages that they consider to be excessively radical (what they call "extreme feminism" or "radical feminism") and which cause certain discomfort or unease among many young men and also some young women. Therefore, a need has been detected **for feminism to reach out to young people by means of more educational messages that really explain what feminism is and what it is fighting for, while at the same time countering the debunking messages that have been proliferating.**
- **Positive** messages would also be useful and **would encourage greater alignment and alliances to be forged between young girls and boys**, with the emphasis on showcasing feminism as a political movement calling for **gender equality as a fundamental social value that benefits the whole of society.**

2. Eliminating sexist stereotypes

- Even though the collective mindset of young people points to gender differences being overcome, the data show that there is still a long way to go for effective equality. Gender stereotypes remain present among adolescents and young people to a great extent. In general, the attributes that characterise femininity are socially more undervalued (caring, responsibility, empathy) than the masculine ones (drive, endeavour, ambition). To change these stereotyped traits, it is fundamental that, in the framework of their public equality policies aimed at children and young people, **Basque public administrations put greater emphasis on questioning sexist stereotypes and the automatic and stereotyped allocation of roles to each of the sexes, thus freeing male and female children, adolescents and young people from gender expectations.**
- To this end, **the messages that recognise and highlight the attributes negatively associated to femininity as central elements for the wellbeing and sustainability of society must, in general, be strengthened.** This change could contribute to boys adopting those values and attributes, contrary to the hegemonic model of masculinity, as positives, as a proof of **their commitment to gender equality, and greater shared responsibility.**

3. Acting strategically to get the gender equality message across to young people: spaces outside formal education, searching for equality alliances between girls and boys, equality education, involving the families.

- **Leisure spaces in general, and sport, in particular,** can be key areas for young people, as they are outside formal education and **provide a work context where the**

relationships are not so staid. They are areas where the equality gaps between girls and boys, the uneven social expectations and the unequal recognition between them can be clearly seen; at the same time they offer an **opportunity to advance in learning about equality in a more robust and consistent way**, in so far that such learning can be experienced, not external imposed as a theory by formal education, but also as a **real and practical experience** that can be embraced as one's own.

- **Having segregated spaces** (only for girls and only for boys) continues to be necessary, as they allow the empowerment of the girls and, in general, also of boys; they provide a safe environment to talk and reflect on equality issues, which often involve deep aspects of our personality and of our experiences. However, the **need to begin to create common spaces** should not be overlooked, to seek **mutual understanding and alliances for the equality causes, as a joint undertaking that benefits both girls and boys.**
- **Equality education must be innovative in means, entertain and attract young people, and must adapt the messages to the target audience**, exchange reflections by means of **ongoing dialogue with the recipients** and **not impose ideas or theories that may be perceived as a sort of indoctrination.** The aim is to avoid the rejection that can be caused by repeating theories presented unilaterally (more common in formal education) and to opt for **models aimed at discussion, listening and sharing experiences** (more viable in leisure or recreational spaces).
- Families are also a key factor and must be included in any strategy to get across the equality message to the new generations; it is therefore essential to **create work programme or spaces aimed at involving families in the passing on of equalitarian value to their children.**

4. Educating and disseminating messages that tackle the trivialisation of violence against women and clarify its relentless link with sexism and the structural inequality between women and men.

- Male violence against women is recognised as a serious breach of human rights; it is therefore particularly concerning that the youth population continues to express some stereotypes and misconceptions about this violence. The fact that increasingly more adolescent boys and young men consider themselves to be victims of feminism could be laying the foundations for the trivialisation and justification of male violence against women. **The message of men being victimised, which tries to defuse the relevance of the damage caused by male violence against women and girls, needs to be questioned.**
- Furthermore, **investing in educating and raising social awareness** about this problem is essential. The new generations cannot be expected to tackle equality and reduce gender-based violence against women by themselves, as they are conditioned by the same sexist social structures as the rest of society. There is a clear need for **the public administrations, particularly in the educational field, to delve further into tracing the linking between gender-based violence against women and structural sexism**, with the emphasis on **eradicating the sexism underlying the structures of the society in which we live.**

- In that endeavour, the administration must consider ways of acting aimed at **raising awareness and actively contributing to questioning the normalisation of gender-based violence against women** which is occurring by means of **certain mass cultural products**, such as some series, films or programmes.
- **Recreational spaces** (sports and free time associations) are spaces that are particularly suitable for working on mainstreaming the rejection of violence among young people and on **preventing gender-based violence against women**.

5. **Explaining in the public discourse the link between gender-based violence and social media: clarifying that sexual violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that is fuelled in the online world and by the social media from early ages and offering whistleblowing channels to ensure that victims are supported and protected.**

- The hyper-presence of sexual violence in our society and above all online is a particularly concerning matter. The fight against male violence against young women should **put a special emphasis on the violence through that medium, as it is a particularly relevant space for young people due to the intensity of use and importance that it has in their relationships, as well as its being a space where violence is intensified.**
- Adolescents and young people are increasingly more in contact online than in person, and a lack of ability to manage conflicts in that sphere can be seen. Sexist attacks against girls, female adolescents and young women online have no whistleblowing channels that offer them protection and safety to be able to escape that type of gender-based violence, whether due to lack of knowledge or such channels not existing. Work is needed on **offering girls, female adolescents and young women whistleblowing and protection channels for online sexist attacks, by further improving them, and raising awareness and accessibility of safe channels to report and for support in the case of sex attacks in social media.**

6. **Educating from an early age —both in the family and at school— on broad and rigorous knowledge of human sexuality and on the ethics of respectful and equal sexual relations, to prevent the use of the type of pornography that is contrary to people's dignity (particularly of women and girls) as a channel for knowledge about sexuality in childhood and adolescence.**

- Consumption of pornography has increased substantially among children, adolescents and young people in recent years; having channels that help youngest people to build their mindset regarding sexuality has become increasingly more important. **Many studies warn that the patriarchal culture - through pornography among other channels - idealises, legitimises and eroticizes sexual violence.** Violent sexual content can affect the understanding of personal relationships and reinforce sexual violence among young people. Even though some young people are aware that violence is highly present in pornography (particularly *hard-core* pornography) and can recognise that it fundamentally affects women, **it is important for adolescents and young people to have sufficient tools to allow them to make critical analysis in that regard.**

- Avoiding violent and degrading behaviour towards women being part of the sexual desire of adolescents involves **a greater emphasis on the sexual emotional education of the youth population, both in the family and the educational field**, including both formal education and **non-formal education spaces**. **Involving the families** in this regard is fundamental. Sexual emotional education must be addressed **from early childhood in the family context and subsequently collaboratively in the education sphere**. This education must **be comprehensive and preventive and go hand in hand with the socialisation of young people from early ages**. There is a pressing need to **build another social mindset regarding sexuality**, in which **shared pleasure and mutual respect is at the heart of sexual-emotional relationships**.
- In any event, to end the sexist model of sexual relations and foster sexuality based on equality and respecting everyone, a **sexual-emotional education for children that starts at an early age and is included within the formal curriculum** needs to be implemented, and the young people's opinion should also be considered when designing the programmes. The workshops currently run at compulsory and upper secondary levels do not engage or motivate the adolescents that are the target audience and do not clarify their real doubts regarding sexuality. Therefore, there is a need for **formal sexual-emotional education to be comprehensive and first-rate, involve the whole educational community, including the families, and consider sexuality from the perspective of experiencing pleasure, not only from prevention and contraception**.
- In this sphere of **formal education**, it is also considered essential to carry out **advanced educational work that allows the message of equality in sexual relations to be conveyed to children and adolescents, resorting to their own language and prioritising dialogue and listening, over indoctrinating**. Finally, adult role models are considered necessary in the centres for sexual-emotional topics.