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Synergies between gender equality and climate action

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Exploring synergies between gender equality and climate action in Cyprus

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Abstract

This paper delves into the gender-specific challenges and opportunities in Cyprus's pursuit of a just green transition. The absence of a comprehensive system for collecting, reporting, and monitoring gender-disaggregated data poses a hurdle, despite recent steps outlined in the National Gender Equality Strategy. Focusing on Women in STEM and green jobs, the paper illuminates stark gender disparities in STEM education and employment, emphasizing the pervasive "leaky pipeline" phenomenon. Analysing Women in green decision-making in Cyprus, the underrepresentation of women in political, economic, and social power is striking. The paper expands to additional considerations, such as the feminized impact of energy poverty, the gender pay and pension gap, single parenthood challenges, and unpaid care work. Cyprus in the past few years has seen a large and unprecedented influx of migrants and asylum seekers. It is a high-risk destination country for climate refugees and the paper highlights the gender-based violence risks, particularly for trafficking victims. The paper reflects on the potential exacerbation of domestic violence in the context of the climate and energy crisis. The policy debate section outlines Cyprus's strategies and commitment to gender-inclusive policies, and the government's acknowledgment that the effects of the climate and energy crisis are not gender-neutral. The paper also illustrates some commendable initiatives, including those promoting equal pay and women in STEM and provides recommendations including the need for systematic data collection, the need to combat gender stereotypes at all levels, awareness-raising campaigns and institutional state support and social policies.

Introduction

The impacts of the climate and energy crisis affect everyone, yet they are significantly shaped by deeply rooted gender inequalities. Women bear a disproportionate burden during heat waves, droughts, rising sea levels, and extreme storms. Gender-specific implications of energy poverty further exacerbate these challenges, as women often experience lower incomes due to the gender pay and pension gaps. Additionally, they face constraints in accessing basic human rights, compounded by discrimination, social norms, and expectations at the family, school, and societal levels. The heightened vulnerability of women to systematic violence during periods of instability adds another layer to the complexity. As climate change intensifies, women emerge

as particularly vulnerable. This paper aims to explore and illustrate the intricate connections between climate change and gender equality in Cyprus.

1. Relevant country context

Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean region in general, face unique environmental exposures, as they are located on the border between the temperate climate zone and the deserts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The entire region, in addition to exposure to high air pollution, has been <u>declared</u> one of the hotspots of climate change in the world. This makes the country highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change from significant increase in temperature resulting in increase in the frequency and intensity of droughts and hot weather conditions.

1.1 Collection of gender-disaggregated data for a just green transition

At present, Cyprus has yet to establish a comprehensive system for collecting, reporting, and monitoring gender-disaggregated data concerning a just transition. While some data exist, it is scattered and not easily accessible, posing challenges for the development of gender-sensitive climate policies. There is an urgent need to improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data on the impacts of climate change and to implement 'Gender Impact Assessments' (GIAs).

In the recently approved National Gender Equality Strategy for 2024-2026 by the Council of Ministers on 11/01/24, the government acknowledges that the effects of the climate and energy crisis are not gender-neutral. In response, the government is actively pursuing data collection initiatives outlined in Actions 10.2 and 12.2¹, recognizing the critical need for comprehensive statistical information. The absence of this crucial information highlights the significance of these actions within the framework of the new national strategy.

1.2 Women in STEM and green jobs

Promoting women's participation in STEM is crucial. The green transition, fostering an eco-friendly economy, could worsen gender inequalities if women are underrepresented in emerging job sectors. The demand for STEM-educated individuals is set to rise, but current gender disparities limit women's access to opportunities. Encouraging women in STEM is vital for economic independence,

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¹Action 10.2 focuses on gathering and processing gender-specific statistical data related to participation in the fields of research, innovation, and cybersecurity. Likewise, Action 12.2 emphasizes a statistical assessment of the representation of men and women in decision-making positions across various entities. Acknowledging the significant gender imbalance in such roles, the objective is to address the underrepresentation of women, thereby ensuring a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process.

narrowing the wage gap, and addressing global challenges through diverse perspectives.

STEM education in Cyprus: Statistics from the Statistical Service, as of January 2023 with data from 2021, expose a significant gender disparity. Among tertiary education graduates in Cyprus, a mere 6% were women, while 19.6% were men in programs related to Engineering, Processing, and Construction. Likewise, in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), only 2.4% were women, and 8.6% were men.

STEM employment in Cyprus: Cyprus records some of the lowest percentages of both women and men working in STEM professions in the EU. In the ICT sectors, the gender gap is pronounced, with only 1.6% of women compared to 6.1% of men, according to the Women in Digital Scoreboard 2022, ranking Cyprus 21st in Europe. The European Gender Equality Index (EGEI) 2019 further indicates that in Cyprus, a mere 4% of women, compared to 27% of men, work in STEM occupations.

The statistics clearly demonstrate that even when some women choose to study in the fields of STEM, many of them do not pursue these fields professionally. Within the first year of employment, a significant number of women exit the industry.

Leaky pipeline phenomenon: According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 from the World Economic Forum, among those who graduated with a STEM degree in 2017, 35.5% were women. One year after graduation, only 29.6% of those occupying STEM positions were women, indicating a decrease of 5.9%. In 2021, women constituted 38.5% of STEM graduates compared to 31.6% of women employed in STEM fields one year after graduation, reflecting a decrease of 6.9%. This phenomenon, referred to as the "leaky pipeline," is observed not only in the transition from tertiary education to the workforce but across every educational stage. Multiple factors contribute to this decline, including the male-dominated work environment, concerns about facing a sexist workplace, limited opportunities for advancement compared to male counterparts, and the perception of receiving lower pay. Therefore, fostering an inclusive corporate culture is essential to encourage and support female engineers and scientists throughout their professional journey.

1.3 Women in green decision-making

Although evidence seems to suggest that (young) women are at the forefront of climate activism and that women's participation in corporate boards and research is associated with positive results for the green transition, they remain underrepresented in decision-making spaces².

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² Gender Equality Index 2023 Towards a green transition in transport and energy

According to the EGEI 2023, Cyprus ranks overall, in the 21st place in the EU with 60.7 points out of 100. Cyprus has most room for improvement in the domain of power, in which it scored 29.2 points in this year's edition of the Index. Since 2020, the country has fallen from 24th to 26th place in this domain, which was the lowest ranking for Cyprus in any domain. If we compare its score with the EU as a whole, Cyprus is 29.9 points lower than the EU average.

Cyprus scores quite low in the percentage of women in all political, economic and social power. In the 2nd quarter of 2023, women representation was as follows: 25% ministers, 14% members of parliament, 15% members of local municipalities, 12% members of boards in largest quoted companies, supervisory board or board of directors, 13% board members of the central bank, 25% board members of research funding organisations, 11% board members of publicly owned broadcasting organisations, 8% of the highest decision-making body of the National Olympic Sport Organisations.

After the recent cabinet reshuffle in January, the new government structure does not fundamentally challenge the traditional power model. Instead, it reflects the male-dominated political culture of the country. Political power continues to be unequally distributed between women and men, as out of the 11 Ministers, only 2 are women (18%). Furthermore, among the 7 Deputy Ministers, 5 are women (71%). According to relevant legislation regarding the responsibilities of deputy ministers, it is clarified that these positions do not entail the right to propose legislative regulations and do not have the right to participate in the decision-making process in the Council of Ministers.

According to the EGIE 2023 that focuses on the socially fair transition of the European Green Deal, senior administrators in national ministries dealing with environment and climate change (%, 2022) were 25% women and 75% men. Members of parliamentary committees dealing with environment and climate change (%, 2022) were 12% women and 88% men. Annex A contains the composition of the House of Representatives (Parliamentary) Committees at the moment of writing this paper.

1.4 Additional things to consider

1.4.1 Energy poverty - Feminized poverty

Women face a disproportionate impact from energy poverty, driven by factors like the gender pay gap, pension disparities, and physiological differences. Sociocultural norms, influencing unpaid care and housework division, also contribute. This affects low-income women significantly, leading to heightened exposure to energy poverty and inadequate heating at home. Without targeted policies addressing gender-specific aspects, there's a risk of worsening gender inequalities.

Pension gap: in Cyprus, the gender pay gap stands at 9.7%, and the gender pension gap reaches 39%, with women over the age of 60 facing the poverty threshold at a rate of 15%.

Single parenthood: According to the EIGE 2023, in Cyprus, nearly half (46%) of single mothers and one-third (32%) of single fathers face the risk of poverty or social exclusion, and will be unable to keep their homes adequately warm. While official statistics on the % of single mothers and fathers in Cyprus are unavailable, after communicating with the Association of Single-Parent Families, they conveyed their estimate that over 90% of single-parent families in the country are headed by women.

Unpaid care work: With a score of 58.4 points, Cyprus's ranking has decreased in the domain of time since 2020, dropping from the 20th to the 25th place. In the subdomain of time spent on care activities, the country dropped from 16th place to 21st. More analytically Cyprus's performance by indicator were: People caring for and educating their children or grandchildren, elderly or people with disabilities, every day (%, 18-74 population, 2022) Women: 41, Men: 28. People doing cooking and/or housework, every day (%, 18-74 population, 2022) Women: 70, Men 33.

1.4.2 Gender based violence

Climate Refugees: Women and girls forcibly displaced by climate change and environmental degradation are at particular risk of violence, including sexual violence (Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem). In the past few years, Cyprus has seen a large and unprecedented influx of migrants and asylum seekers. Cyprus is a high-risk transit and a destination country for women victims of trafficking in human beings. According to the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), conviction rates for smugglers who exploit women for sex, forced marriage, and labour remain low. Displaced migrants enter Cyprus either via the sea or by crossing the UN controlled buffer zone that divides Cyprus³. Smugglers, often presenting themselves as agents offer their services to potential asylum seekers, without explaining the intricacies of the political situation on the island. This leaves migrants and especially women at risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation (Angeli, 2020) ⁴.

Domestic Violence: The climate and energy crisis may contribute to domestic violence, especially in the aftermath of sudden disasters. This phenomenon often arises due to economic stress, loss of control, and trauma associated with unanticipated catastrophic events, leading to the erosion of community and cultural ties, as well as scarcity of food and basic provisions. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cyprus experienced a significant increase in domestic violence, exemplified by a 40% rise in calls seeking help from the Association for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (SPAVO).

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³ Areas south of the dividing 'Green Line' are controlled by the Republic of Cyprus; areas to the north are administered by the Turkish Cypriots who declared the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' in 1983 which is recognised only by Turkey. Two out of three migrants who apply for asylum in the Republic of Cyprus arrive by irregularly crossing the Green Line.

⁴ Angeli, M. (2020). Gender dynamics in the reception & integration of displaced migrants.

2. Policy debate

In the recently approved <u>National Gender Equality Strategy for 2024-26</u>, by the Council of Ministers on 11/01/24, the government acknowledges that the effects of the climate and energy crisis are not gender-neutral. The strategy incorporates 66 actions many of which are directly or indirectly linked to aspects related to the impact of the climate & energy crisis on gender equality. **Annex B provides the full list of relevant actions.**

Cyprus, has committed to the <u>Gender Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Action</u>
<u>Partnership Pledge</u>, aiming to promote women in decision-making centers for actions and policies to be gender-inclusive.

The integration of gender dimensions and the introduction of measures specifically addressing women are integral parts of the <u>Common Agricultural Policy (2023-2027)</u>. One of the objectives of the common agricultural policy is to advance equality and equal opportunities between women and men. See target 8.⁵

3. Good practice examples

EQUAL PAY: The National Certification Body for the Implementation of Good Practices for Gender Equality in the Working Environment, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, is responsible for certifying businesses that implement policies ensuring gender equality, equal opportunities for advancement and training, work-life balance, and, in particular, the principle of equal pay between men and women for equal work or work of equal value among their personnel.

WOMEN IN STEM: In order to combat the underrepresentation of women in STEM, Frederick University is running the <u>"To: All women and girls, Join the Journey in Engineering & Technology"</u> Campaign offering a 50% scholarship to ALL women who choose to study a program at the School of Engineering and organises STEM DAYS and STEM CAMPS for girls 9-16 and workshops for their parents. The initiative is under the auspices of the Commissioner for Gender Equality.

The Presidency of the Republic - Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, in collaboration with the Cyprus State Scholarship Foundation, announced the awarding of ten (10) state scholarships to women with Cypriot citizenship for undergraduate studies, in fields related to innovation and technology.

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⁵ Target 8 states: Promotion of employment, development, gender equality, including women's participation in agriculture, social inclusion, and local development in rural areas, including circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry.

<u>Girls in STEAM Academy</u> is another initiative that aims at bridging the gap of low female representation in STEM through a 2-day programme that aims help participants learn more about potential careers in these fields.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

EU Member States can enhance gender-disaggregated data collection by providing training to relevant institutions and professionals involved in data collection to ensure they understand its importance and possess the necessary skills. Developing standardized guidelines ensuring consistency and comparability across different sectors and countries, conducting awareness campaigns, and providing incentives for organizations to prioritize the collection of gender-disaggregated data (recognition, awards, or funding opportunities tied to robust data reporting) are crucial steps. Moreover, achieving coordination and communication among government bodies and services that will need to analyse and use the data is equally vital. Without effective coordination, there is a risk of fragmented implementation of measures to develop gender-sensitive climate policies. A collaborative and cohesive approach ensures that the collected data can be maximally utilized to inform comprehensive and impactful policies addressing gender-specific challenges in the context of climate action and just transitions.

To foster a gender-equal workforce in green and just transition sectors, gender stereotypes must be combated at home, in schools, and throughout society. We need to educate teachers about unconscious gender bias and career counsellors about emerging job sectors, develop gender-sensitive lessons and curricula, make women in STEM visible, as girls need role models. Organizations should be more womenfriendly and just, but institutional support from the state is also needed. We cannot rely solely on schools or companies; social policies and structures supporting women must be in place.

Engaging communities in the green and just transition is critical for success. This involves raising awareness through educational campaigns and events, fostering participatory decision-making with community involvement, and providing job training and employment opportunities in collaboration with local businesses. Encouraging community-owned initiatives, supporting public-private partnerships, and ensuring access to green infrastructure.

Promoting female leadership in the green and just transition, especially in the political and public sector, requires targeted efforts. Strategies include advocating for gender equality policies, establishing mentorship programs, providing leadership training, and promoting visibility through media campaigns. Implementing gender-responsive recruitment, fostering supportive work environments, and creating networking opportunities are vital. Institutional support from the state, including social policies and structures supporting women, are also essential.

Annex A

At the moment of writing this paper, the House of Representatives (Parliamentary) Committees are as follows:

Standing Committee on	% of women
Foreign and European Affairs	2 out of 11 (18.18%)
Financial and Budgetary Affairs	2 out of 12 (16.66%)
Internal Affairs	2 out of 11 (18.18%)
Defence Affairs	0 out of 11 (0%)
Education and Culture	0 out of 11 (0%)
Transport, Communication and Works	1 out of 11 (9.09%)
Energy, Trade, Industry and Tourism	0 out of 11 (0%)
Agriculture and Natural Resources	0 out of 11 (0%)
Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance	1 out of 11 (9.09%)
Legal Affairs, Justice and Public Order	2 out of 11 (18.18%)
Health Affairs	2 out of 11 (18.18%)
Development Plans and Public Expenditure Control	3 out of 11 (27.27%)
Refugees-Enclaved-Missing-Adversely Affected Persons	1 out of 11 (9.09%)
the Environment	3 out of 11 (27.27%)
Human Rights and on Equal Opportunities for Men and	5 out of 10 (50%)
Women	
Institutions, Merit and the Commissioner for	2 out of 11 (18.18%)
Administration (Ombudsman)	

Annex B

National Gender Equality Strategy for 2024-2026

- 1. Gender-responsive budgeting: Equitable distribution of public resources
- **Action 1.1:** Technical assistance and training to integrate gender dimensions at all levels of the state budget formation process, ensuring decisions on any policy, administrative, or other action consider the different impacts on men and women.
- **Action 1.2:** Implementation of gender mainstreaming as a tool for assessing the impact of policies on men and women, covering areas such as allowances, taxation, and retirement.
- **Action 1.3:** Conducting a study to restructure relevant fiscal programs, measures, and policies to allocate funds equally to women and men.
- **Action 1.4:** Implementation of a zero VAT rate for personal hygiene products through the issuance and/or renewal of the relevant decree.
- 2. Gender and Employment: Equal access to employment, promotion of balanced representation of women and men, reduction of wage and pension gaps
- **Action 2.1:** Mapping representation and needs of women and men in the maritime sector.
- **Action 2.2:** Recording the representation of men and women in professions in the tourism sector and the blue economy.
- **Action 2.3:** Transposition into National Law of European Directive 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023, for the reinforcement of the application of the principle of equal pay between men and women for equal work or work of equal value, through wage transparency and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Action 2.4:** Study and evaluation of qualitative wage gap analysis in collaboration with social partners.
- **Action 2.5:** Study to assess professions, responsibilities, and salaries.
- **Action 2.6:** Comparative study for pension benefits based on a gender perspective.
- **Action 2.7:** Enhancing female employment through a) incentive plans for hiring women with flexible arrangements and b) Incentive plans for hiring unemployed women.
- **Action 2.8:** Implementation of action plans with private enterprises to promote gender equality.
- **Action 2.9:** Training programs to strengthen women's entrepreneurship targeting rural women/farmers.
- **Action 2.10:** Comparative study and consultation with social partners to increase maternity leave by 4 weeks for the first child.
- **Action 2.11:** Study and consultation with social partners to adopt facilitations for single-parent, three-child, large families, and families with children with disabilities or specific diseases.

3. Gender and Social Policy: Strengthening an effective welfare state from a gender perspective

Action 3.1: Study for expanding subsidy beneficiaries and working hours in childcare centers during the summer months, including August

Action 3.2: Study for the modernization of structures and/or the creation of new structures and the care system for the elderly

Action 3.3: Payment of a minimum guaranteed income to people with disabilities, excluding child allowance and single-parent family allowance from the family income, as part of the broader review and modernization of the subsidy policy

Action 3.4: Creation of new or upgrading/expansion of existing Multi-Purpose Centers for children, as well as childcare centers and 24-hour care centers for adults with long-term care needs (small structures integrated into the community accommodating up to 10 people)

4. Gender and Health: Equal access to health based on the different needs of women and men

Action 4.1: Awareness campaign on home care for pregnant women

Action 4.2: Study on the gradual introduction of contraception methods with initial focus on vulnerable population groups

Action 4.3: Information on contraception methods for asylum seekers

Action 4.5: Maintenance of statistics on the termination of pregnancies and pregnancies through medically assisted reproduction

5. Gender and Justice: Creating a gender-sensitive culture in the justice system and equal access to justice

Action 5.1: Amendment of Family Law bills by introducing regulations that promote and ensure gender equality

Action 5.2: Establishment of the Men and Women Equality Committee in the Fire Service and the Prison Department and training of Committee members

Action 5.3: Conducting a study to identify indirect and structural inequalities and discrimination faced by women in their access to justice

Action 5.4: Establishment, on a regular and systematic basis, of training programs for gender equality for officials of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Police

Action 5.5: Strengthening information (through easily accessible means) for women about their rights arising from the principle of gender equality

Action 5.6: Study to identify any institutional/structural discriminations and/or inequalities based on gender resulting from the application of existing social legislation

Action 5.7: Training programs for judges, women and men, on gender equality issues

Action 5.8: Training programs for Legal Service lawyers on gender equality issues

Action 5.9: Public awareness through targeted means regarding the Law on Combating Sexism and Online Sexism and Related Issues

Action 5.10: Conducting research/mapping to explore the specific correlation of the 'gender' factor with women's imprisonment in prisons

6. Gender and Foreign Policy: Gender approaches in Foreign Policy

Action 6.1: Institutionalization of mentoring programs for female students wishing to join the diplomatic corps

Action 6.2: Promotion of actions in neighbouring countries within the framework of development cooperation

Action 6.3: Enhancement of active participation of the Republic of Cyprus in the decision-making process in the European Union and in multilateral organizations

Action 6.4: Strengthening bilateral relations through actions and programs related to gender equality

Action 6.5: Training programs for gender equality in diplomatic personnel

Action 6.6: Organization of side events with an emphasis on gender equality

7. Gender and Education and Culture: Shaping a gender-inclusive educational and cultural environment

Action 7.1: Enrichment of the content of educational programs with actions that promote empathy, equality between men and women, prevention of violence against women, consent, and respect

Action 7.2: Training programs for Career Counselors and other educators to deconstruct gender stereotypes and promote gender equality

Action 7.3: Modernization of Cyprus history books and inclusion of the action of Cypriot women, highlighting their role and history

Action 7.4: Recording works in the State Gallery of Contemporary Art to recognize and promote Cypriot women artists

Action 7.5: Promotion of cultural heritage and rural women through events contributing to the country's tourism

Action 7.6: Creation of exhibitions in Archaeological Museums and Galleries, showcasing works that highlight the role of women both in antiquity and in modern times

8. Gender and Sports: Empowerment and equal recognition of women in sports and deconstruction of gender stereotypes in sports

Action 8.1: Training programs for executives of sports federations for gender equality

Action 8.2: Institutionalization, every two years, of an Ambassador for Gender Equality in sports

9. Gender and Rural Development, Environment, Climate Change, Energy, and Transportation: Increasing the visibility of rural women. Shaping gender transport. Recognition of gender impact of climate and energy crisis

Action 9.1: Creation of training programs on finance for rural women and men

Action 9.2: Study on the integration of gender dimension into energy policies

Action 9.3: Creation of a gender-friendly work environment for women and men bus drivers

Action 9.4: Adequate lighting at new bus stops, parking lots, and parks

Action 9.5: Implementation of the female figure in pedestrian crossing lights

Action 9.6: Creation of parking spaces for families with strollers and for pregnant women

10. Gender - Research, Innovation, and Digital Transformation: Empowering men and women and equal utilization of digital capabilities

Action 10.1: Establishing digital education training programs for rural women

Action 10.2: Collection and processing of gender-disaggregated statistical data for participation in the fields of research, innovation, and cybersecurity

Action 10.3: Training and implementation of educational programs for gender equality and deconstruction of stereotypes in entities receiving government funding for research and innovation issues

11. Gender and Defense: Creating an environment with more sensitivity to the gender dimension

Action 11.1: Mapping the needs and knowledge/skills of male and female workers in the National Guard and the Ministry of Defense regarding equality issues **Action 11.2:** Targeted and systematic training for all ranks serving in the National Guard, including the CYOP, personnel of the Ministry of Defense, and national guards

12. Gender and Decision-Making Positions: Promoting balanced representation of women and men for fair and representative decision-making

Action 12.1: Promoting equal representation of men and women in the administrative boards of sports federations

Action 12.2: Statistical assessment of the representation of men and women in decision-making positions (Administrative Boards of Legal Entities of Public Law, Public Service Commission, Education Service Committee, Advisory Board, etc.)

Action 12.3: Creation of a Digital Archive of Cypriot Women in Politics

Action 12.4: Transposing into national law Directive 2022/2381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022, on improving the gender balance in the management boards of listed companies and related measures

13. Gender and Mass Media: Active contribution to shaping gender norms, eliminating stereotypes, and prejudices

Action 13.1: Journalism awards dedicated to gender equality (biennial)

Action 13.2: Experiential and interactive workshops for representatives of the media to promote gender equality

Action 13.3: Campaign for stereotype-free advertisements