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Security matters: gendered geopolitics of war, militarisation and global uncertainty

About Security Radar 2025

For Security Radar 2025, the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe polled 14 countries in September 2024 on public attitudes towards foreign policy and security questions. FES surveys countries under the aegis of Security Radar at regular intervals. More information can be found on our website.

Executive summary

Gendered perspectives on security are more relevant than ever as Europe faces a period of growing militarisation and global uncertainty. Drawing on data from six OSCE countries – France, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Türkiye and Ukraine – this report analyses gendered views on Europe’s shifting security landscape with a focus on militarisation, the war in Ukraine, economic crisis and climate change.

The report adopts a feminist geopolitical lens and considers how gender intersects with age, income, employment status and geopolitical context. Moving beyond essentialist assumptions to the effect that women tend to be pacifists and men protectors, it offers a nuanced picture of how peoples’ material circumstances, emotional responses and national political imaginaries shape their attitudes toward security matters.

Key Findings:

- **A gendered vulnerability gap:** Women worry more than men about their immediate safety, personal future and economic outlook. This »gender worry gap« is most pronounced in the mid-life cohort (ages 50–59) and among financially vulnerable women.
- **Competing priorities: guns or butter?** Regarding the defence vs social spending dilemma, women's and men's preferences are shaped by economic status and life course. Women in the mid-life cohort and low-income men tend to favour social investment over military budgets.
- **Diverging threat perceptions:** When it comes to perceived global threats, women are more concerned about wars, conflicts and climate change, and men are more worried about uncontrolled immigration. Gender differences in threat perception align with masculinist narratives of national protection.
- **Youth polarisation:** Gender gaps are sharper among young adults (18–29): young women are especially concerned about wars, conflicts and climate change, and young men about migration. This reflects how overlapping anti-gender, nationalist and right-wing populist discourses may shape emotional responses to global threats in line with traditional gender roles.
- **Gendered interpretations of the Ukraine war:** Views on the Ukraine war and its consequences exhibit gendered divergence. Men more often believe the war has benefited NATO and the EU, while women think that the war has rather benefited Russia and are more pessimistic about the current strength of international institutions.
- **Moving beyond stereotypes in foreign policy preferences:** Attitudes toward solving foreign policy crises are complex, as women show no less support than men for isolationism or military solutions in particular countries. Women put more emphasis on international cooperation based on shared values, whereas men appear to be more pragmatic.
- **National context trumps gender:** National differences prevail over gender differences when it comes to concrete questions around peace, security and international cooperation, dividing women along fault lines such as national wealth, proximity to war, and EU and NATO membership.

To make security policy more responsive, inclusive and forward-looking, the report offers five key recommendations:

1. Acknowledge that security isn't just about borders; it's also about jobs, schools and the climate. Redefine security in terms of social and ecological stability, alongside territorial defence and military readiness.
2. Avoid assuming that women inherently oppose defence spending or that men always favour it. Instead, tailor communication and policy framing to reflect the economic realities and life-course positions of different groups, especially low-income men and mid-life women, who show a stronger preference for social investment.
3. Develop targeted messaging that acknowledges the issue-based nature of the gender worry gap. One example is women's heightened concern for climate and war, and men's for immigration, especially among young adults, among whom the gaps are largest. Counteract polarising anti-gender rhetoric by debunking stereotypes related to masculinity, protection and threat perception.
4. Recognise the gendered divergence in geopolitical outlooks, as men tend to see institutions such as NATO or the EU as strengthened, while women tend to see them as weakened. Address this by using security-based messaging that incorporates value-relevant narratives that resonate with women's concerns.
5. Although women express greater concern for climate change, they don't necessarily support international cooperation more than men. Focus not just on amplifying concern but on speaking to both pragmatic and ethical motivations in foreign policy, highlighting cooperation when values align and caution when interests conflict.

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has had far-reaching consequences for countries in Europe and beyond as, among other things, it has exposed the tensions around the post-Cold War enlargement of the EU and NATO. Together with the rise of right-wing populist political projects, ongoing post-Covid economic and technological transformations, spiralling consequences of climate change, and dramatic shifts in US foreign policy since Trump's return to power, Europe is facing a period of militarisation and war, accompanied by a high level of geopolitical uncertainty.

Europe's shifting security landscape has gendered consequences. Militarisation reinforces a masculinist social order in which women are portrayed as passive victims while men become responsible for protecting »womenandchildren« from internal and external threats. Often endorsed by right-wing populist projects, anti-gender mobilisations threaten women's bodily and sexual rights. Cuts in social spending deepen the care crisis in ageing societies, pushing women further into precarious employment and unpaid care work. Women's role as care givers makes them more susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change (UN Women 2025). Although still recognised as world leaders in gender equality, many European countries are no longer »safe spaces« for women (European Commission 2025).

»Womenandchildren« [sic]

A term coined by feminist international relations scholar Cynthia Enloe (1990) to critique the use of »women and children« as an abstract category. Enloe's work on gender and militarism shows how the normative assumption that women are innocent and men are perpetrators helps to sustain patriarchal relations in national and global politics.

To trace gendered views on Europe's shifting security landscape, this report looks at six OSCE countries that were polled for Security Radar 2025: France, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Türkiye and Ukraine. Taking a »feminist geopolitics« perspective, it considers national, supranational and subnational commonalities and differences between men and women, as well as among women across the six countries regarding their opinions on selected hard and soft security issues, including growing militarisation, the war in Ukraine, economic crisis and climate change.

The previous Security Radar Gender Analysis (2023) tackled the »gender knowledge gap« in security policy. It showed the structural dynamics that lead to women's disproportio-

nately high »don't know« responses on hard security topics. This year's report tackles an equally salient aspect of women's engagement with security matters, namely that they are worried, often much more worried than men. Scrutinising the »gender worry gap« from various angles, it asks which women are more worried, where and why? Are there issues that worry men more than women, too?

This report considers age, employment status, income level and geopolitical differences as factors that influence gendered experiences and expressions. The aim is to move away from essentialist understandings of men's and women's relationship to security matters and instead to identify some significant tendencies, trends and patterns that are shaped by current developments in Europe and beyond. The findings of the study challenge the assumption that women are always more peaceful, oppose military solutions and are oriented towards diplomacy. The results call for a rethinking of blanket approaches to gender in security policy and for greater coordination between security policy, social policy and climate policy.

Geopolitics through a feminist lens

The 2025 Security Radar survey found a Europe »lost in geopolitics«. In recent years, the concept of geopolitics, understood as the politics of power and territory, has indeed become increasingly prominent. According to the Brussels

Feminist geopolitics

This is a perspective that calls for a critical rethinking of geopolitical concepts such as security through feminist theory. It emphasises everyday life, non-elite actors, care, emotions and embodied experience, as well as an intersectional analysis of power. It focuses on global issues from a gendered perspective by challenging the public-private divide on a global scale, establishing connections between distant places and problems, and juxtaposing the concept of »human security« with that of »state security«. Addressing the disconnect between different life realms, feminist geopolitics bridges »soft« and »hard« security issues and enables a multi-level analysis while breaking down the abstract category of »women« into social groups with differential interests, needs and belonging (Hyndman 2001; Koopman 2011; Massaro and Williams 2013).

Institute for Geopolitics (2024), this has to do with the onset of a new historical era marked by the end of post-Cold War peace in Europe, giving way to a resurgence of politics of power, territory and narrative.

Integrating gender into security policy entails recognising that women and men, as well as gender-diverse people experience security issues differently and that gender equality is crucial for good governance and the effective functioning of the security sector. Organisations such as the European Institute for Gender Equality highlight that while there has been some improvement in acknowledging that the policy area is not gender-neutral, persistent gender inequalities hamper women's contribution to the security field. Women are still highly underrepresented in security organisations (EIGE 2023a). In security policy they are either seen as passive victims, for example of violent extremism or organised crime, or their gender-specific experiences and needs are overlooked, for example, in the case of migration (EIGE 2020).

The perspective of feminist geopolitics has two implications for a better understanding of gender and security. The first implication is that instead of taking national contexts as the main unit of analysis, we should consider scales that are »finer« and »coarser« than the nation-state (Hyndman 2001, 210). In an increasingly globalised, connected world, women in distant places might have more in common in their approaches to and experiences of security than women within national boundaries. Within national boundaries, they might exhibit patterns of insecurity that diverge from the national trend. Challenging »methodological nationalism«, feminist geopolitics allows us to account for supranational and subnational factors that are at work in both people's experience and the making of security policy.

Methodological nationalism

This is a dominant pattern in social science research, in which the nation-state is taken as the primary unit of analysis and assumed to be a self-contained, homogenous entity. As a result of methodological nationalism, diversity within national borders, transnational flows and the interconnectedness of social and political phenomena in a globalised world may be overlooked.

The second implication of feminist geopolitics is that by taking gender as an intersectional category of analysis it allows for the integration of the interests and concerns of different groups of women and men as a key element of democratic policymaking processes. This means, instead of prioritising gender over other categories, such as class and race/ethnicity, or assuming that women will necessarily act

upon their gender-based needs, we look for the meaningful difference gender makes in security landscapes. Depending on the specific security issue in question, women might feel that they have common interests with men of their own group or with women of another group. In addition to class and race/ethnicity, factors such as generation or geopolitical location influence how »interests« are defined.

Intersectionality

Coined by the feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality refers to the understanding of gender, class, race/ethnicity and other axes of power as co-constructing vectors of social inequality. It is an analytical tool for studying how interlocking power dynamics generate unique experiences of privilege and discrimination for different groups of men, women and other gender identifying people. An intersectional analysis is crucial for challenging essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity in relation to security.

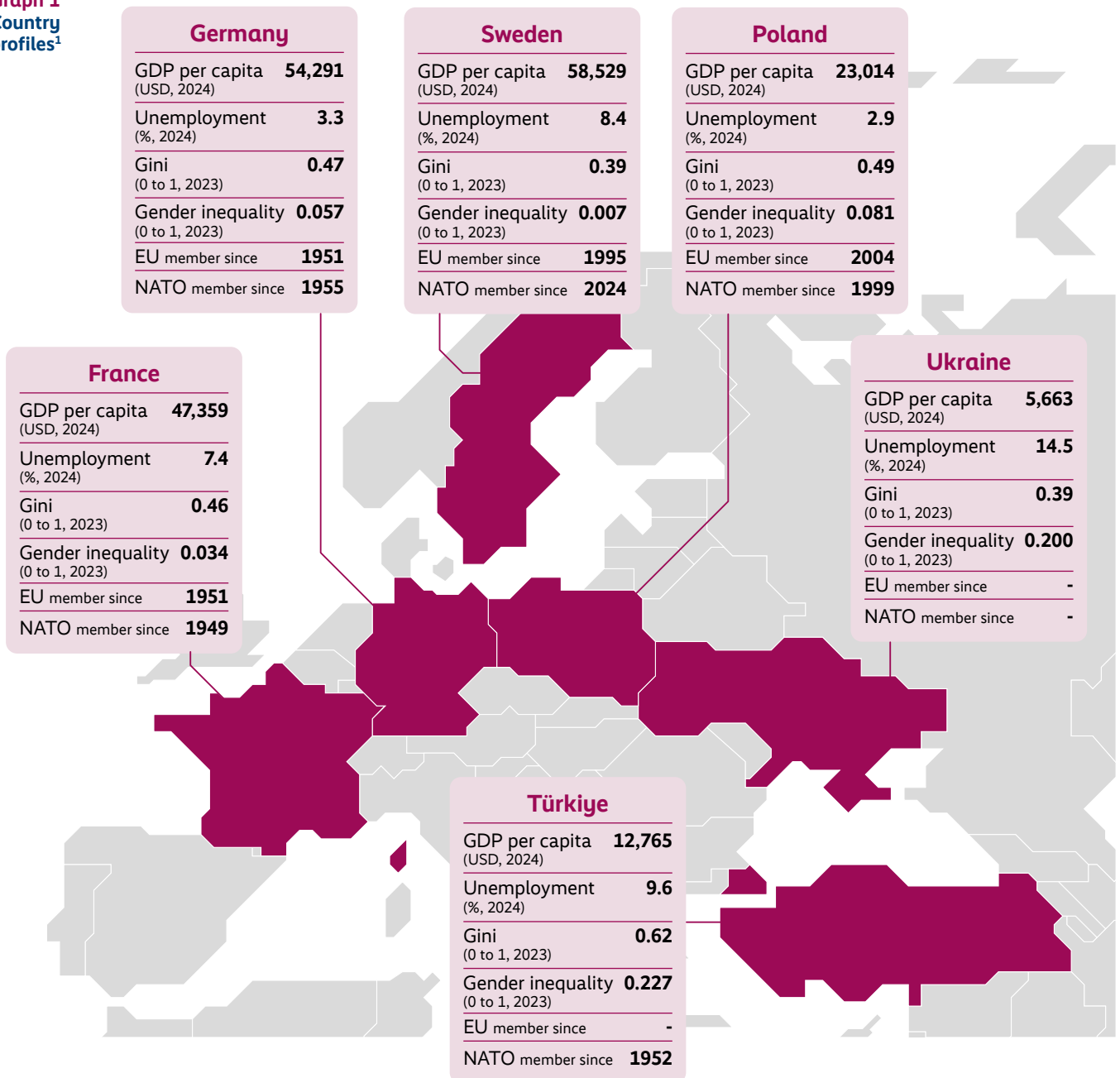
Against this background, we ask the following questions:

- How do (i) men and women and (ii) women among each other differ in their security perceptions within and across the six countries?
- What may be the social, political and historical factors that contribute to gender and spatial (national, subnational and supranational) differences in attitudes towards soft and hard security matters?
- What policy implications and recommendations arise from these gender and spatial differences?

Connecting national contexts

The six countries studied in this report – France, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Türkiye and Ukraine – cover a wide territory from east to west and north to south in the greater Europe area and possess a range of characteristics. They have notable variation in terms of socio-economic measures, such as GDP per capita, income inequality and un/employment levels. France, Germany, Poland and Sweden are EU members; Türkiye is a long-term candidate; and Ukraine aspires to become a member. East Germany, Poland and Ukraine experienced state-socialism during the Cold War, whereas France, Sweden, Türkiye and West Germany belonged to the Western camp. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, all countries have experienced profound changes in their security policy, contributing to Europe's re-militarisation. They are all NATO member states, except Ukraine, which has a pending application.

Graph 1
Country profiles¹



The status of women and gender equality in relation to indicators such as employment and labour force participation shows great variation among the six countries. According to UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, gender inequality is lowest in Sweden and highest in Türkiye. One thing that unites these countries beyond the vast differences in gender equality indicators is the contestation of women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Led by neo-nationalist, conservative, religious or right-wing political and civil society actors and popularly known as »anti-gender mobilisations«, these contestations aim at coordinating efforts – often simultaneously at local, national and global scales – to undermine or re-

verse gender equality policies (Wittenius 2022). Anti-gender actors perceive advancements in gender equality as a threat to the institution of the family, local culture and national identity. In Poland and Türkiye, certain demands of these actors such as restricted access to abortion or withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention have been incorporated into the legal framework. In France, Germany and Sweden, the popularity of anti-gender agendas is steadily increasing. The same trend was observable in Ukraine, but it was reversed by the war and the current government's investment in EU values, including gender equality.

¹ Source: GDP per capita and unemployment rate: [IMF](#); for Gini coefficient: [Our World in Data](#).

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

see Graph 1

A combined metric for measuring gender inequality based on women's disadvantages in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The index reflects the loss in potential human development as a result of gender inequality in these dimensions. A lower GII value indicates lower inequality between women and men.

Three themes explored

Discussing these six national contexts together and in relation to each other, the following three sections look at the themes of »personal situation«, »global threats« and »peace and security«, respectively. They aim to capture national differences, as well as supranational and subnational similarities. In terms of the differences between women and men and among women, we consider the impact of age, income level and employment status, as well as geopolitical differences.²

Each section discusses key dynamics that shape gendered views on security matters. The first section highlights the impact of life course and finances on people's concerns about their immediate safety, economic outlook and personal future. The second section points to global threats that generate higher levels of worry in women (wars, conflicts and climate change) and men (uncontrolled immigration) and considers the influence of new nationalisms on this differentiation. The final section offers insights into questions around geopolitical power and international cooperation with a focus on foreign policy crises and climate change, and emphasises that national belonging prevails over gender differences when it comes to addressing concrete foreign policy issues.

Methodology

In the statistical examination of the dataset, cross-tabulations and regression analysis were used to determine key gendered and spatial patterns and correlations. Non-binary respondents were excluded from the analysis because they are too few in number (only four in Sweden and two in Germany) to allow us to draw meaningful conclusions. In order to keep the focus on expressed opinions and compare affirmative patterns of worry and threat perception between men and women, »don't know« and »no response« categories were removed from the dataset. The results were read together with qualitative research on women's status and the differential consequences of war, militarisation and global uncertainty in the six countries and beyond.

Unpacking the gender worry gap

Because of their exclusion from policymaking processes, women have less control over the political and economic decisions that influence their future. They are historically more insecure and therefore more prone to worry. In the context of increasing militarisation, social policy matters, such as welfare and quality of life, take a back seat. This can cause higher levels of worry in women than men. At the same time, both women and men will have different things to worry about during their life course and factors such as class position and educational background might have a huge impact on their specific concerns.

In our sample, although – outside Ukraine – people feel quite safe in their immediate surroundings, their expectations are very high that both their personal future and economic outlook will deteriorate in the future. But there is also a visible gendered trend: **women are more worried than men.** For example, in a country known for ranking high in gender equality indexes, such as Sweden, some 39 per cent of women are »very worried« about the rising inflation and cost of living compared with only 23 per cent of men. In other words there is a 16 percentage point gender gap. By contrast in Türkiye, a country currently undergoing a prolonged economic crisis, the gender gap is as little as 4 per cent with 72 per cent of women and 68 per cent of men »very worried«.

This brings up the question of who worries more, about what and why? In this section we pinpoint the specific groups of women and men who express significantly higher levels of worry about the issues of immediate safety, personal future and economic outlook by examining respondents' sociological profile. Age, employment status and income bracket emerge as factors that affect people's material conditions and thus their worry levels.

Life course and finances

Life course and finances are deeply intertwined as each stage of a person's life brings different financial needs, risks and opportunities. In return, finances shape how people navigate life stages such as education, employment, family formation or retirement. Structural factors such as social policy, labour regime and intergenerational wealth mediate the relationship between the two.

In our sample, two cohorts stand out from the average in terms of their diverging worry levels: young people between 18 and 29, and the middle-aged group between age 50 and 59. We call them »young adults« and the »mid-life

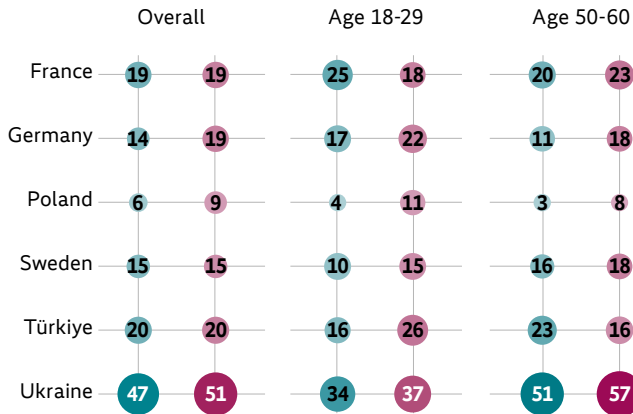
² Despite its high importance, race/ethnicity cannot be part of the analysis because of the disproportionate representation of the dominant ethnicity of each national context in the sample. The percentage of the respondents who affiliated themselves with the dominant ethnicity of a given country are as follows: in France: 99%; Germany: 96%; Poland: 99%; Sweden: 95%; Türkiye: 98%; Ukraine: 96%.

Graph 2 Levels of worry among women and men by topic

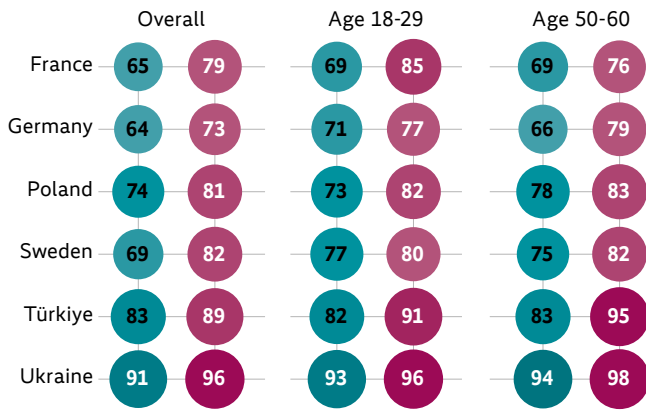
Values for the more worried segments of 'young adults' and the 'mid-life cohort'. All figures in %

■ Men ■ Women

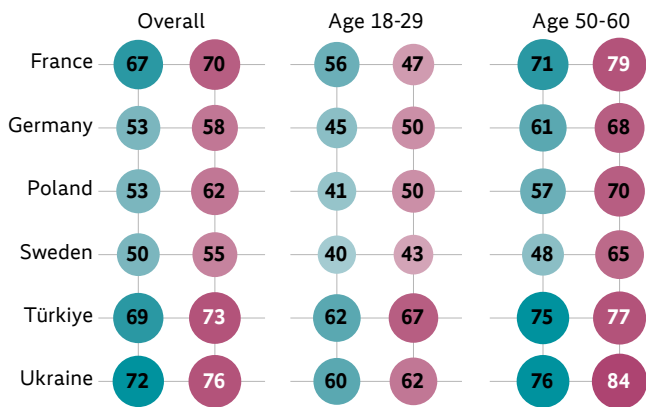
Immediate safety



Future concern



Economic outlook



cohort». Broadly speaking, young adults are studying or seeking job stability and potentially experiencing early income inequality. The mid-life cohort are at the peak of their careers while having care responsibilities and saving for retirement at the same time.

Looking at the overall safety and worry levels of men and women and those in the young adult and mid-life cohorts, the following findings are notable:

- In terms of immediate safety, the trend is for men to feel safer than women. In terms of personal future and economic outlook, women worry more than men.
- Young adults tend to feel safer than the average, and the mid-life cohort tends to feel less safe.
- Regarding personal future and economic outlook, too, young adults are less worried than the average, and the mid-life cohort is more worried.

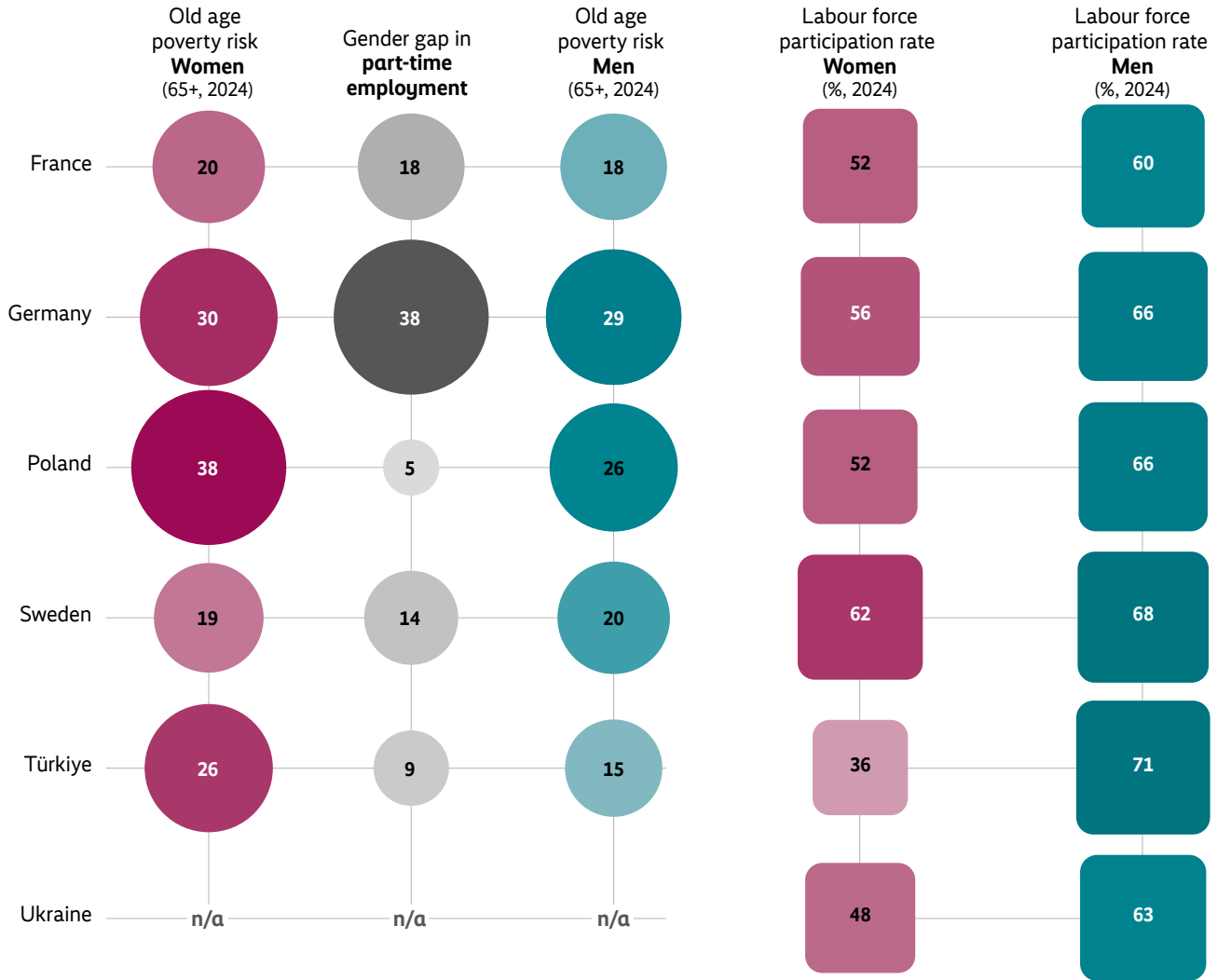
→ Concerns about personal future display wider gender gaps in France, Germany and Sweden; narrower gaps occur in Poland, Türkiye and Ukraine. This overlaps with the wealthier and poorer halves of our sample in accordance with their GDP per capita (Graph 1).

It is understandable that young adults should be less worried about their economic future. They are still in their formative years, likely to be studying or perhaps already working. They have not yet established their lives. By contrast, the mid-life cohort has above-average worry levels (except in Sweden) about their economic future. The gender worry gap also expands significantly in this cohort.

This might be because, having spent their adult lives switching between care responsibilities and paid work, many women in their fifties are approaching retirement and old age knowing that their pension prospects are not particularly good. They might still be supporting their children financially, taking care of elderly parents or starting to have health issues themselves. Combined with gender inequality in the domain of time, in which women across the board spend more time performing housework and care work, a lot might fall on their shoulders in this part of their lives (EIGE 2023b). Graph 3 shows that, again except for Sweden (and Ukraine, due to lack of available data), women have a higher risk of old age poverty.

Graph 3 Gender gap in part-time employment and the risk of old age poverty³

All figures in %



Notwithstanding the relationship identified between gender, age and worry level, there is also a lot of variation in the data. Some of this is expected. For example, Ukrainians, currently at war, feel the least safe and most worried about the future. But some of it appears to be anomalous: younger men in Germany and France feel less safe than women. Younger Swedish men are far above the average

with regard to their worries about the future. In terms of economic outlook, Polish women display the widest gender worry gap across cohorts. Why? There may be several reasons, but one thing is certain: income bracket and employment status are key parameters.

³ Source for gender gap in part-time employment in France, Germany, Poland, Sweden (2024): European Commission; for Türkiye (2022): TUIK; for old age poverty risk: European Commission. Source for labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women: [World Bank](#); for men: [World Bank](#); for the unemployment rate of women: [The Global Economy](#) (separately for [Ukraine](#)); for men: [The Global Economy](#); (separately for [Ukraine](#)); for gender inequality index: [Our World in Data](#). Because of the war, all data from Ukraine are from 2021. It is estimated that women's labour force participation has increased since the outbreak of war as many men have mobilised for military service or fled the country, and businesses have hired women to fill jobs traditionally held by men, such as truck drivers, coal miners and construction workers.

A look at feelings of safety and levels of worry differentiated by gender and income bracket, as well as gender and employment status (Graph 4) shows:

- The feeling of immediate safety is correlated with income for both genders. Women in the highest income bracket feel even safer than men. Feeling of safety is further connected to employment status. Part-time workers and the unemployed feel least safe. In our sample, women are overrepresented in the »unemployed« and »part-time« categories, and the »full-time working« category contains more men than women. Considering the direct relationship between employment status and income level, this suggests that one of the reasons for women's lesser feeling of safety has to do with their economically vulnerable position compared with men.
- There is a negative correlation between income level and people's worries over the economic outlook. This correlation is more pronounced among men than women. Because of their higher incomes and consequently

higher pensions, full-time working and retired men are significantly less worried than their women peers. Part-time working and unemployed men and women are similarly worried. In the »low-to-no income« group, men outnumber women in terms of worrying about the economy. The group of students and trainees, populated mostly by young adults, are the least worried about their finances. However, men in this group have a higher worry level than women.

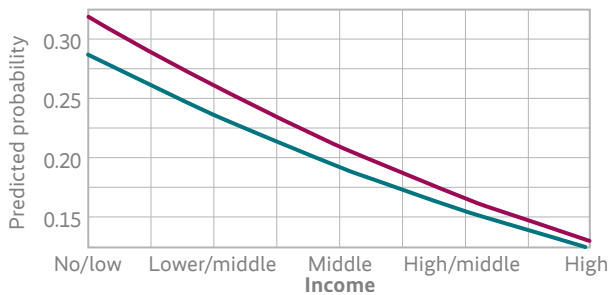
- Similarly, the lower their level of income, the more people are worried about their personal future. Part-time workers and unemployed people, two groups populated by more women than men, are more worried about the future than full time workers. At the same time, the gender worry gap grows with income; it is greatest in the high-income group, and smallest in the low-to-no income group. This implicates the greater influence of gender identities and gendered worldviews on predictions about personal future compared with those about economic outlook.

Graph 4 Feeling of safety and levels of worry, by gender and income bracket, and gender and employment status.⁴

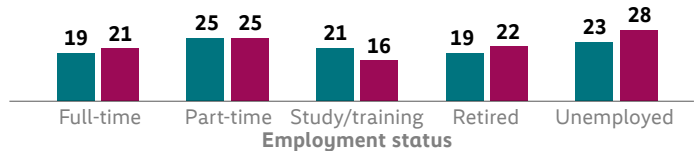
Answers 'somewhat agree' and 'strongly agree' recorded together.

— Men — Women

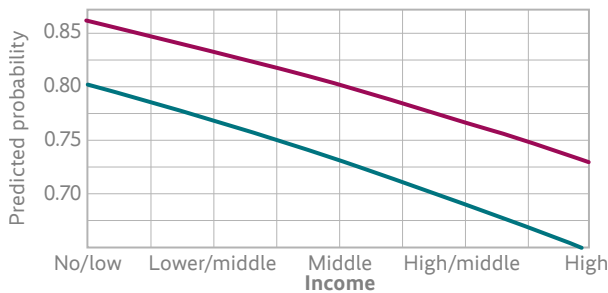
Probability of **feeling unsafe in the immediate surroundings** by gender and income bracket



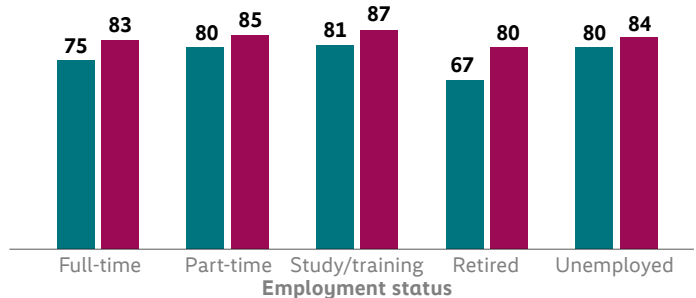
Worry levels about **ones immediate safety** by gender and employment status (*worried & very worried answers, in %*)



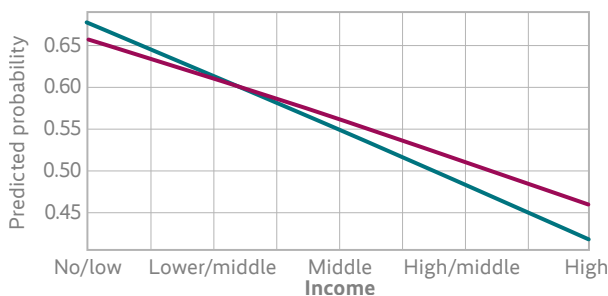
Probability of **worrying about ones personal future** by gender and income bracket



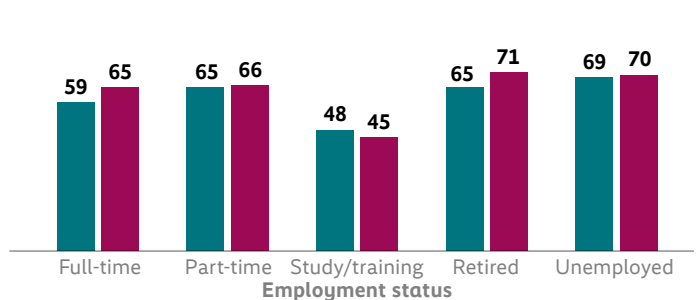
Worry levels about **ones personal future** by gender and employment status (*agree & strongly agree answers, in %*)



Probability of **worrying about ones economic future** by gender and income bracket



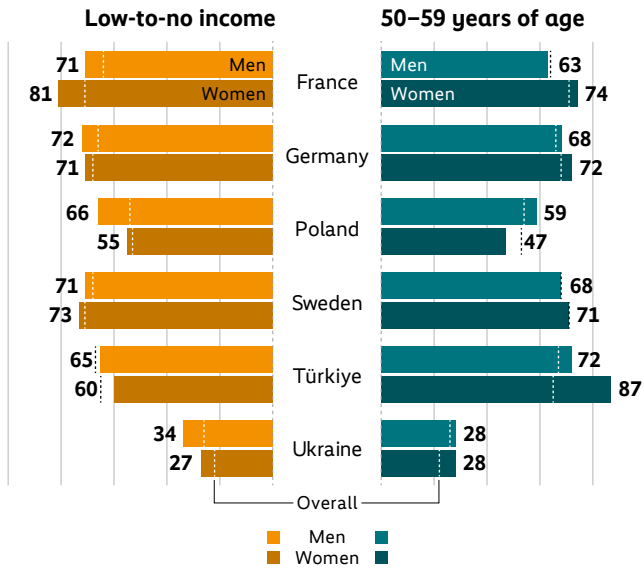
Worry levels about **ones economic future** by gender and employment status (*agree & strongly agree answers, in %*)



⁴ Ukraine is not represented in the high and high-middle income brackets.

Graph 5 Preferences for social spending over defence spending in the low-to-no-income group and the 50–59 age group

Those who prefer 'economic and social affairs over defence'. All figures in %



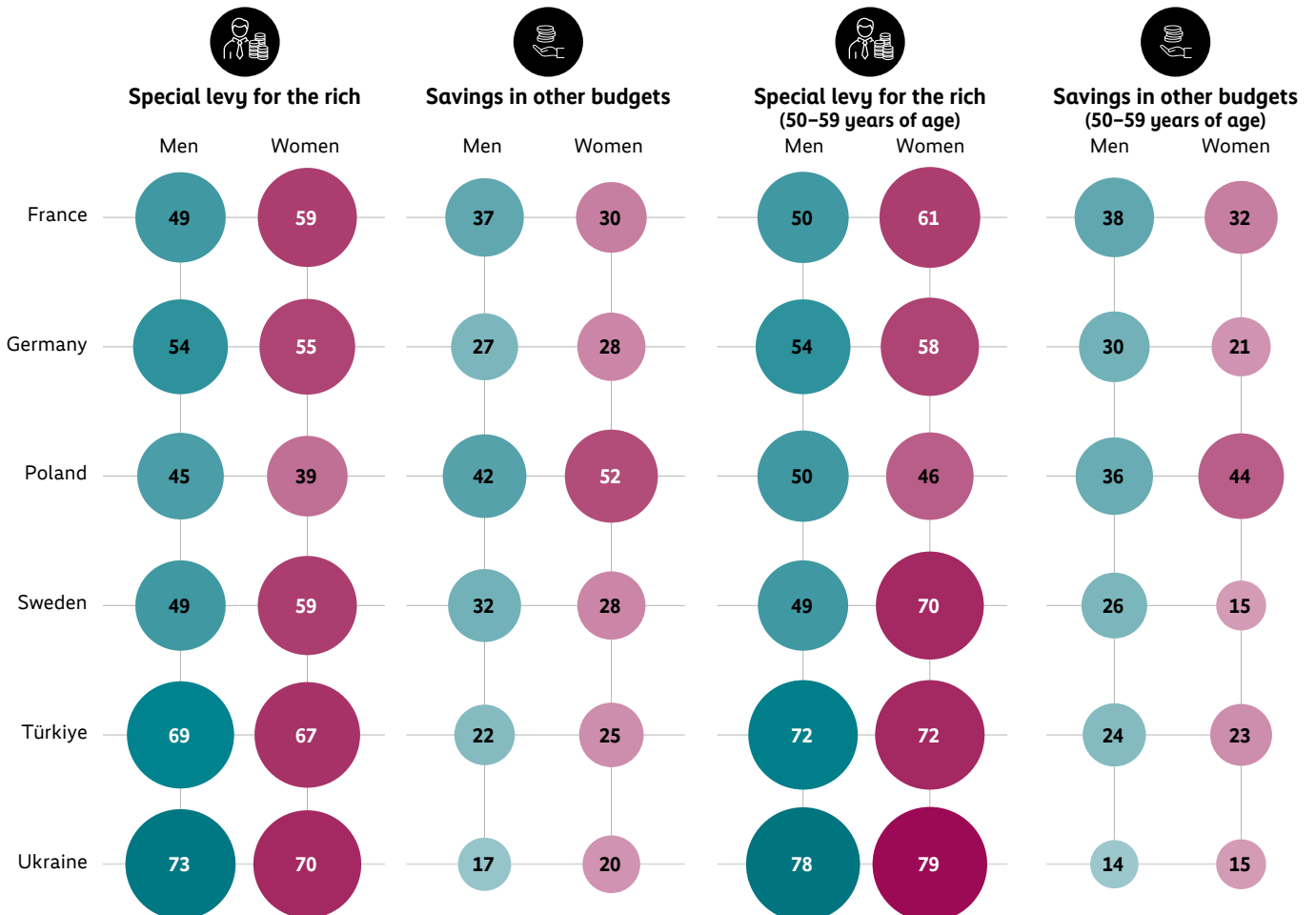
Social spending over defence?

Given their greater economic vulnerability, one would expect women to opt for allocating the limited government budget on social spending rather than defence, even in times of military escalation or war. This indeed seems to be the case in France, Germany and Sweden, the wealthier half of our sample, but not in Poland, Türkiye and Ukraine. Despite their economically more fragile situation, it is not necessarily always women who show greater opposition to cuts to social spending when it comes to financing military costs.

In all countries except Ukraine, the majority of respondents prefer government economic and social spending to spending on defence. In the low-to-no income category in Poland, Türkiye and Ukraine a significantly higher percentage of men than women prefer economic and social spending over defence spending. These are men in the poorer half of our sample in terms of GDP per capita. Income inequalities are also greater in these countries (see Graph 1). Men with low-to-no income probably struggle to provide for themselves and their families. Therefore, despite being in or closer to the war zone, these men still lean away from investing in defence. When we look at the mid-life cohort, this time

Graph 6 Preference for higher defence spending

Answers for the options 'special levy for the rich' and 'savings in other budgets' by gender, and for the age group 50–59. All figures in %



it is women who have more preference for social spending. Wider gender gaps exist in France and Türkiye, where 74 and 87 per cent of women, respectively, support economic and social spending. A similar picture emerges when we look at how the higher military budget should be financed. Higher taxes and new public debt are unpopular across the board, and most people are divided between a »special levy for the rich« and »savings in other budgets, such as social spending«. A special levy for the rich is most popular in Türkiye and Ukraine, where tax inequality is much greater than in other, better regulated economies of the European Union. Men in Poland, Türkiye and Ukraine are greater supporters of levying the rich than women. In France, Germany and Sweden it is the other way around, as 10 per cent more women than men support this option.

In the mid-life cohort, a special levy for the rich becomes a more popular option for men and women alike, but the savings in other budgets option yields varying results. Whereas women's support for social cuts decreased in this age group everywhere except France, men's support for social cuts increased in France, Germany and Türkiye. This once again highlights women's greater need for social support in their older age, while it also reflects the different life trajectories of men and women in different national contexts.

The curious case of Polish women

Polish women are an outlier, exhibiting less support for allocating the limited government budget to economic and social spending than anyone in their cohort, including their male peers. With regard to their preferences on how to finance a higher defence budget, they are the biggest supporters of cutting down on social spending. This is the case even for those in the lower income brackets, and across age groups and political party choices.

While gendered economic realities exert great influence over people's attitude towards financing defence, not everything is about money. In their everyday lives people are not always »rational geopolitical actors«. The next section dives more deeply into factors other than the economy in relation to which women's and men's opinions may differ.

Gendering global threats

The latest World Economic Forum report (2025) on global risks shows an increasingly fractured global outlook in the geopolitical, environmental, societal, economic and technological domains. It also flags up an increasing decline in optimism across the world. Escalating global power struggles are one of the main underlying forces behind the inflated threat perception in world politics (Pomeroy 2025). Ordinary people perceive global threats through mainstream or alternative media or feel the very real impact of these threats in their everyday lives, even though they might not necessarily see themselves as agents of a power struggle in a multi-polar world.

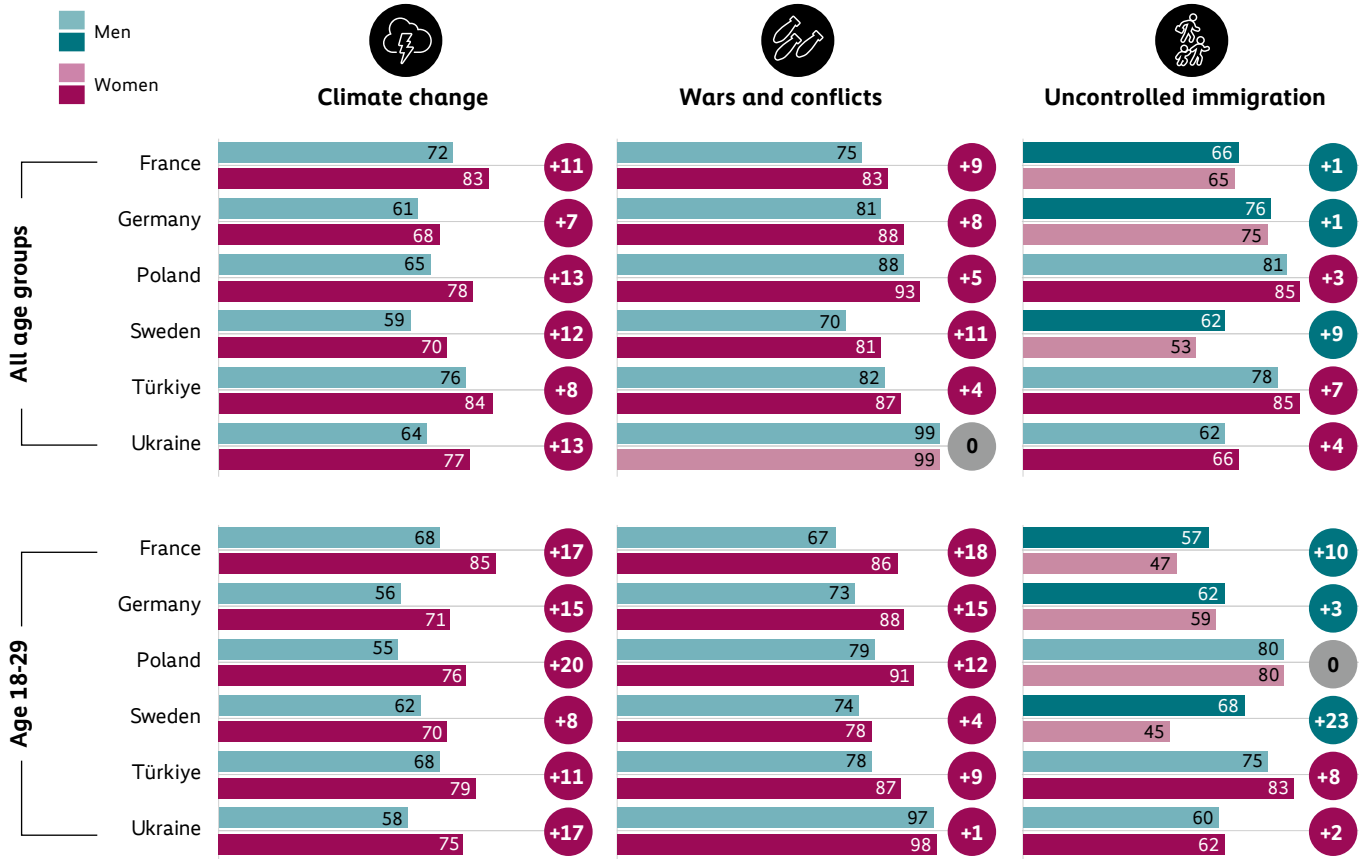
In this section we look at gender differences in respondents' approaches to global threats, focusing on three issues: **climate change, wars and conflicts, and uncontrolled immigration**. The main finding is that the gender worry gap is issue-based within and across countries, and there is no main trend beyond the generic »women worry more« about global matters. However, there is also a clear tendency for women to be more concerned about wars and conflicts and climate change, while men are more worried about uncontrolled immigration. Importantly, on each issue, the gender worry gap grows in the youngest cohort. The second part of this section discusses why this might be the case and considers the influence of new nationalisms on the wider gender worry gap among young adults.

Reproducing life, protecting life

The common assumption that women are more concerned with personal matters and men with political ones is rooted in the association of women with the private sphere and men with the public sphere in modern societies. Generations of feminist scholars have challenged this assumption and shown that the public and private spheres are inseparably intertwined. Many political projects, however, especially nationalist and right-wing populist ones, still endorse the idea that **women are responsible for reproducing life, and men for protecting it, for example, by maintaining social order**. In circumstances of growing militarisation and looming war, the notion of separate life domains in which men and women have different primary responsibilities is reflected in people's perceptions of global threats.

Graph 7 Gender worry gap, by topic and for young adults

'Very worried' and 'somewhat worried' answers recorded together. All figures in %



People in France and Türkiye have the highest level of concern over climate change. These are the southmost countries in our sample, which have already experienced draughts and extreme heatwaves more than the other countries. Located in northern Europe, Swedes are the least worried. In all six countries, we see that women are far more worried about climate change than men. In fact, in Germany, Poland and Sweden, more than 15 per cent of men are »not at all worried« about climate change.

Regarding current wars and conflicts, the broader pattern is that worry increases with proximity to war. Ukrainians, who are at war at the moment, are absolutely worried about current wars and conflicts, followed by Germany, Poland and Türkiye, which have all changed position in response to the military conflicts around them (Türkiye is also affected by those in the Middle East). Beyond the differences between countries, women outstrip men in their worry levels across the board. This is in line with their stronger belief that we are descending into an era of wars and conflicts. Women anticipate more coming wars and conflict and so are also more worried about the current ones. At the same time, the gender worry gap decreases as proximity to war increases. The gap is virtually zero in Ukraine, followed by Poland (5 per cent), while Sweden comes last with 11 per cent more women than men worrying.

By contrast, the issue of uncontrolled immigration seems to worry men more than women. In France, Germany and

Sweden, the number of men who are worried about this issue exceed that of women. In France, 39 per cent of men are »very worried« about uncontrolled immigration in contrast to 32 per cent of women. In Sweden, 31 per cent of men but only 24 per cent of women are »very worried«. Here we also observe the impact of the level of politicisation around the issue of migration in different national contexts. In Türkiye and Poland, where there have been major nationwide campaigns against »immigrants from the east« and a near-national consensus that incoming migration should be stopped, both men and women are similarly very worried about immigration. Germany follows with its recent surge in anti-migrant discourse. In France, Sweden and Ukraine, however, where political polarisation around migration is currently lower, people also express a lower level of worry. This shows how gender identities and nationalist discourses are simultaneously at work in shaping people's perception of global threats.

How can we explain the »reverse gender worry gap« with regard to the perceived threat of uncontrolled immigration? The issue of incoming migration is often formulated as both a hard (like terrorism) and a soft (such as social stability) security problem all at once, mobilising both men and women against it. In our sample, too, most women are still fairly worried about the issue. Especially in nationalist and right-wing populist discourses, however, migrants are also portrayed as a threat to national culture and identity and, importantly, to women's sexual and bodily integrity.

Men are then called upon to protect »womenandchildren« (to borrow Cynthia Enloe’s coinage once again) in the country. Men may also perceive migration as a threat to their patriarchal privileges in the existing social order. Given what nationalist and right-wing populist political projects portray as their primary responsibility – namely, protecting life and maintaining social order – men who subscribe to these projects might experience disproportionately higher levels of worry over uncontrolled immigration.

New gendered nationalisms

Shifting focus to young adults, the trends already mentioned are similar, but more extreme:

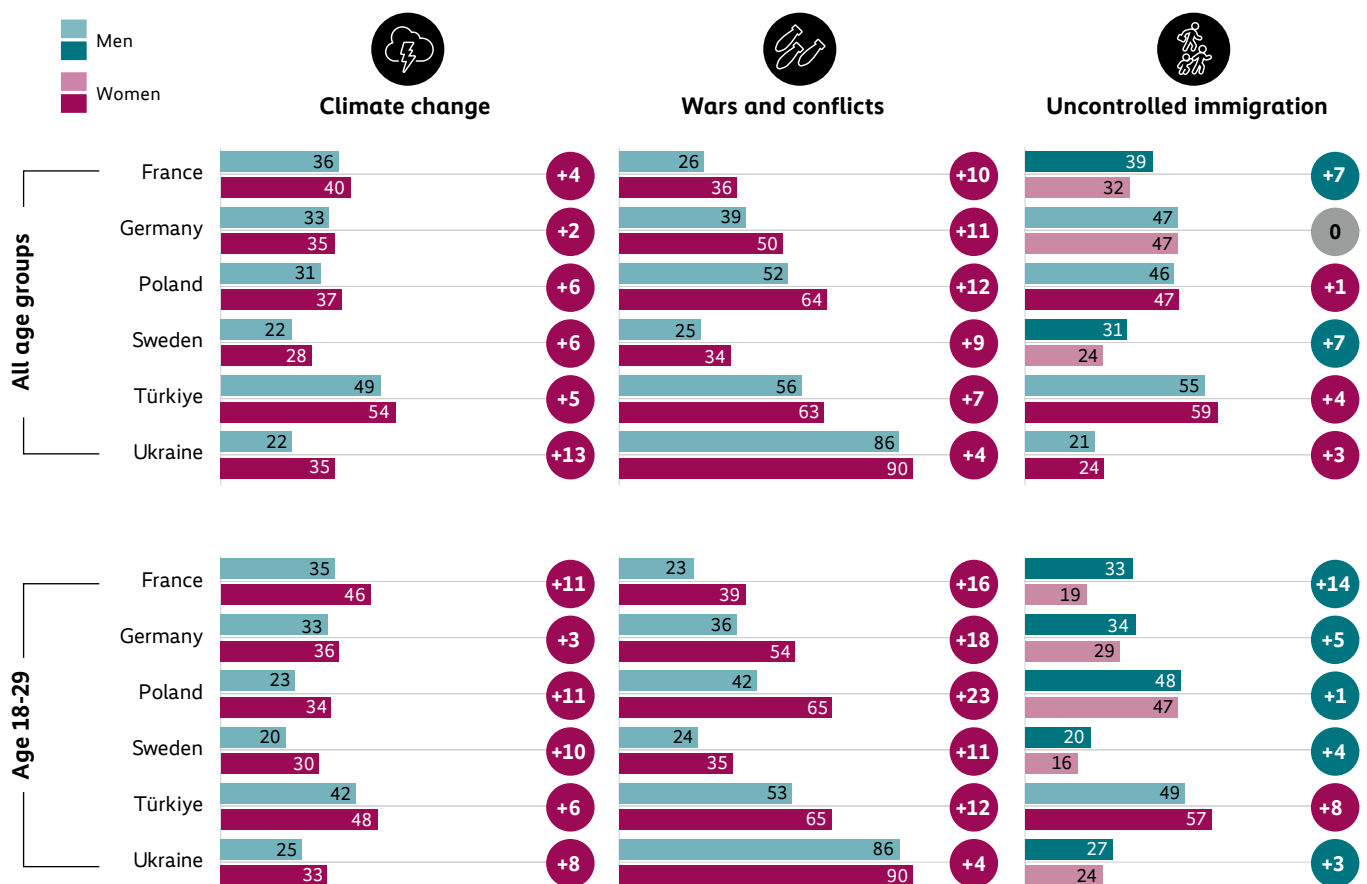
- Regarding climate change, the gap between men’s and women’s worry levels widens among the younger generation (except in Sweden). This is either because younger men worry less, or younger women worry more, or both. The difference can be as high as 20 per cent, as in the case of Poland, where 76 per cent of young women are worried about climate change compared with only 55 per cent of young men.
- When it comes to the »very worried« response, too, there are significant gender gaps of around 10 per cent in France (46 per cent of women vs 35 per cent of men),

Poland (34 per cent of women vs 23 per cent of men) and Sweden (30 per cent of women vs 20 per cent of men). Young men in these countries are also much more satisfied than women with the current climate change measures in their countries. For example, in Sweden, 23 per cent of men in this age group are »very satisfied« compared with only 3 per cent of women, while 40 per cent of men are »somewhat satisfied« compared with 28 per cent of women.

- On the issue of ongoing wars and conflicts, too, the gender worry gap increases significantly among young adults. Except in Ukraine, where the gap is relatively small because of Russia’s invasion, the gap in relation to the »very worried« category is extreme: the difference between women and men is 23 per cent in Poland and 18 per cent in Germany.
- Young adults generally worry less than average about uncontrolled migration. But there are some cases in which the »reverse gender worry gap« increases notably. Sweden presents the most extreme case, where overall 68 per cent of men in contrast to 45 per cent of women are worried about the issue. In France, 33 per cent of young men are »very worried« about uncontrolled migration as opposed to 19 per cent of young women.

Graph 8 Gender worry gap concerning current events, by topic and for young adults

’Very worried’ responses. All figures in %

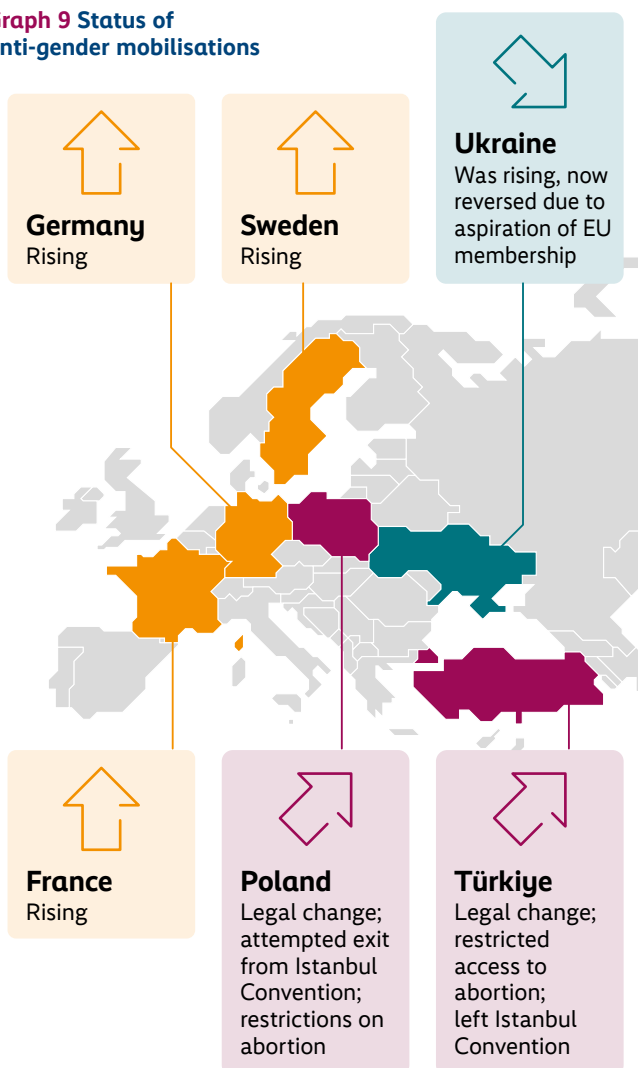


Not at all worried?

»Not at all worried« responses present a curious finding. Regarding climate change, the proportion of young women who are not at all worried in each country is less than 10 per cent, but more than 10 per cent of young men everywhere are not at all worried, reaching up to 17 per cent in Germany and even 24 per cent in Poland. The proportion of not at all worried men also exceeds that of women in relation to worry over ongoing wars and conflicts. The opposite picture emerges with regard to uncontrolled immigration. In France, 21 per cent of young women are not at all worried about this issue compared with 16 per cent of men, while in Sweden the ratio is 18 per cent of women versus 9 per cent of men.

Young adult women thus worry disproportionately about wars and conflicts and climate change, and young adult men about uncontrolled migration. How can we make sense of this wider gender worry gap among the younger generation? What does it say about changing gender roles and perceptions of security in the societies in question?

Graph 9 Status of anti-gender mobilisations



Gendered national imaginaries are not static, but in a state of constant change and remaking. In recent years, anti-gender demands have become more prominent in new nationalist and right-wing populist discourses. Anti-gender demands include opposition to gender equality policies and a return to so-called »natural« gender roles, according to which women are responsible for reproducing life in the private sphere, while men are tasked with protecting it in the public domain. This is in line with a masculinist social order which has been reinforced in the context of war and militarisation.

Do new nationalisms and their endorsement of anti-gender demands appeal more to young men? Recent research does indeed show that young women are significantly more progressive and young men more conservative and/or right-leaning in a number of important policy areas, including gender equality, immigration and environmentalism (Langsæther and Knutsen 2024). Against this background, wider gendered worry gaps among young adults seem to reflect how overlapping anti-gender, nationalist and right-wing populist discourses shape emotional responses to global security threats in line with traditional gender roles. Worrying about wars and climate change is feminised and moralised, while worrying about immigration is masculinised and securitised.

Paradoxes of international cooperation

Because the future is so open ended and susceptible to global threats, the road to international peace may be quite rocky. Women are commonly thought to have a stronger preference for diplomatic solutions when it comes to resolving foreign policy crises. At the same time, many women suffer together with men from political and economic uncertainties, creating a complex picture in which gender appears to be a moving target that is difficult to pin down. At work here are geopolitical differences, competing nationalisms and historical experiences, on the basis of which future predictions are built.

This section discusses gendered attitudes to peace and security with a focus on foreign policy crises and climate change. The main finding is that in the context of escalated power struggles in a multi-polar world and polarised societies, women are also caught between an urge towards isolationism and a desire for cooperation. They are less willing to cooperate with partner countries with whom they do not share the same values, and they do not always prioritise diplomacy over military solutions when addressing foreign policy crises.

Vulnerable security in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine

Security landscapes are changing, but in what direction? In respondents' predictions about peace and security in the world, in Europe and at home over the next five years, national differences prevail over gender differences. People in France and Germany are pessimists, with more than half expecting a deterioration. Poles and Swedes are somewhere in the middle, with more expecting that things will »remain unchanged«. By contrast, remarkably few people in

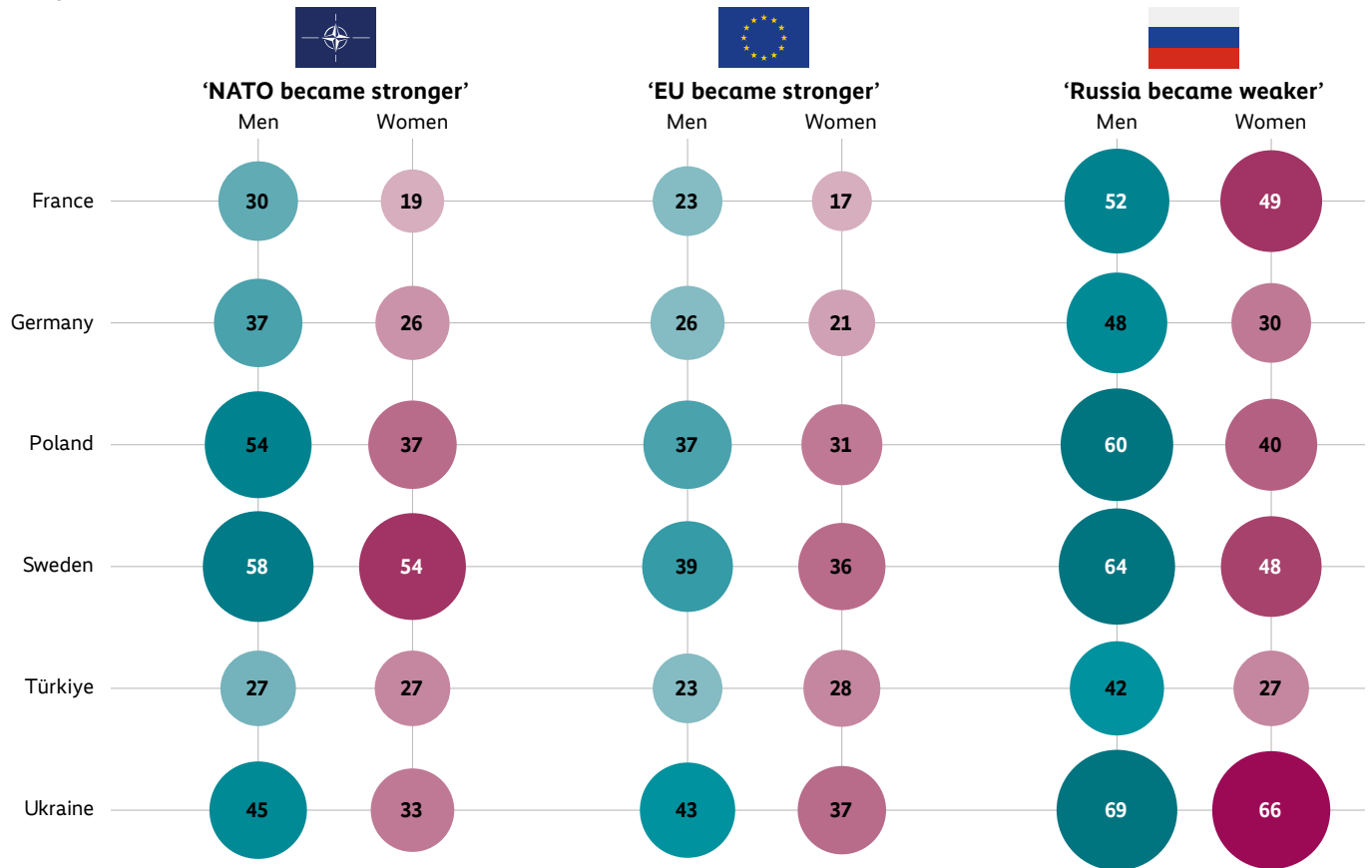
Türkiye and Ukraine expect things to remain unchanged, affected as they are by economic and political crises and war, which render the current situation unsustainable. Beyond these national differences, there is one clear trend: people expect the situation in Europe as a whole to become worse than that in their home countries, and for the world situation to become worse still. As the scale increases, uncertainties grow and pessimism prevails (Graph 10).

Graph 10 Gendered views on peace and security in one's own country, Europe and the world, within the next 5 years
 'Will deteriorate' and 'will somewhat deteriorate' answers recorded together. All figures in %



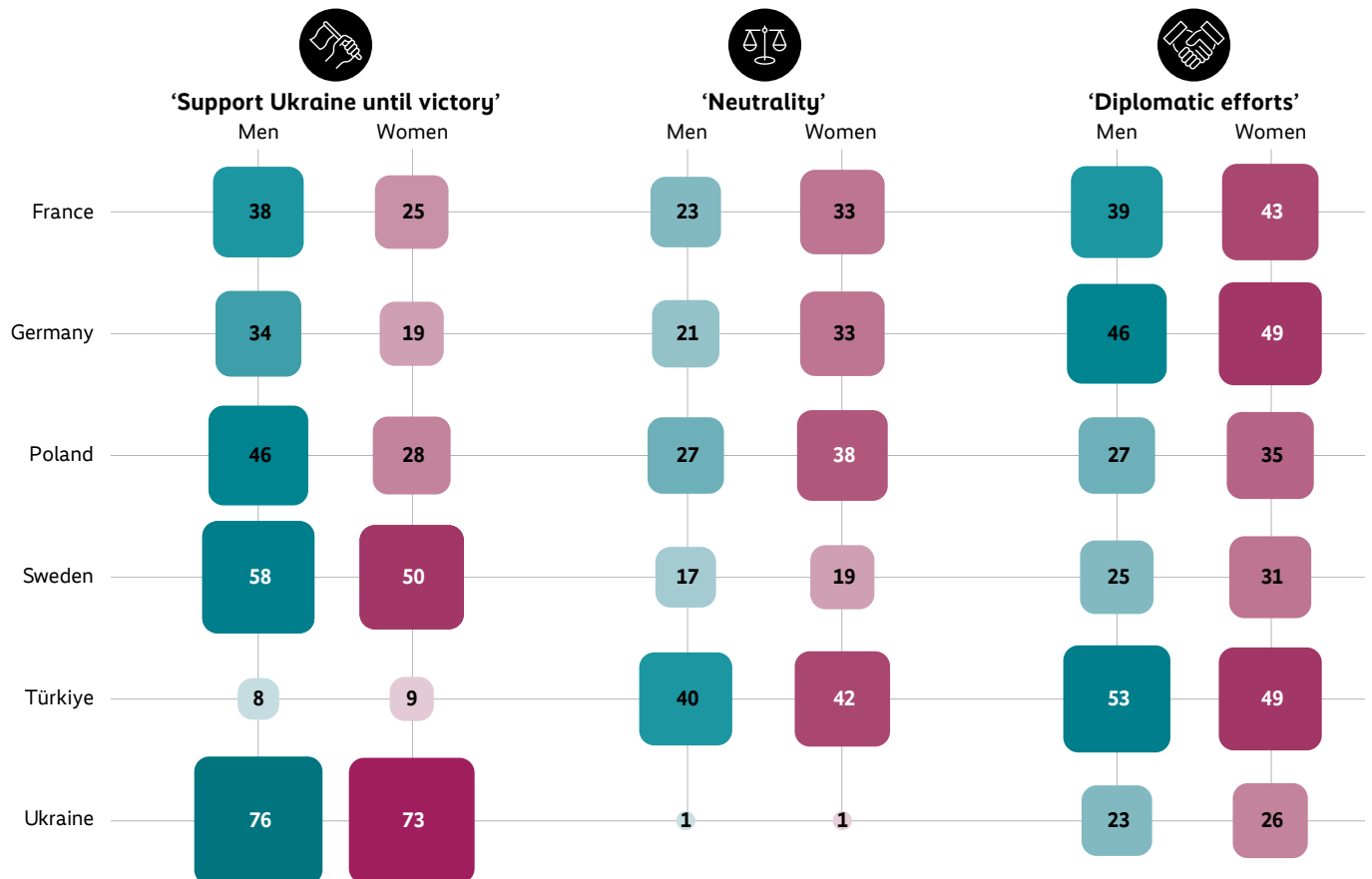
Graph 11 Gendered views on the effects of the Ukraine war on the strength of NATO, the EU and Russia

Values show those who think that NATO and the EU have become 'stronger' and Russia 'weaker'. All figures in %



Graph 12 Positions on Ukraine by gender and preferred course of action for one's own country

All options recorded. All figures in %



One area in which we can follow the gendered dynamics of this rather bleak view of peace and security is the impact of the war in Ukraine on national contexts, the NATO and the EU (Graph 11), and countries' positions on support for Ukraine (Graph 12):

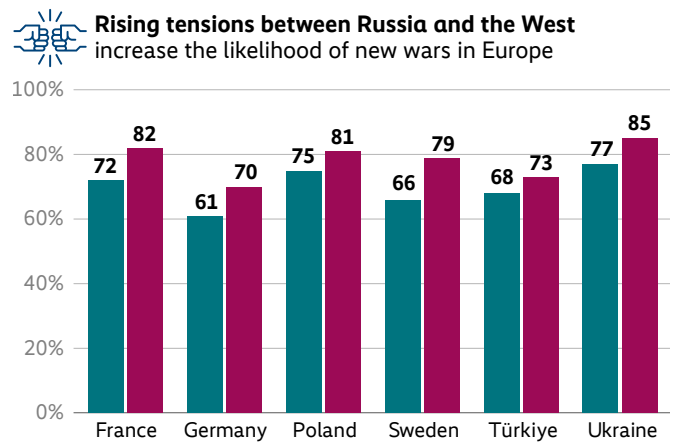
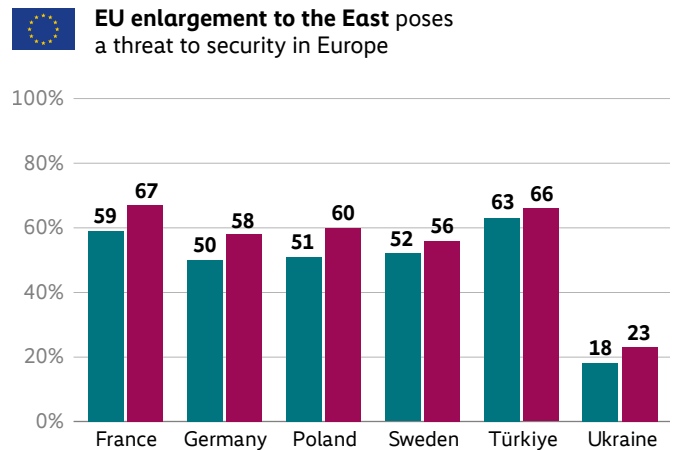
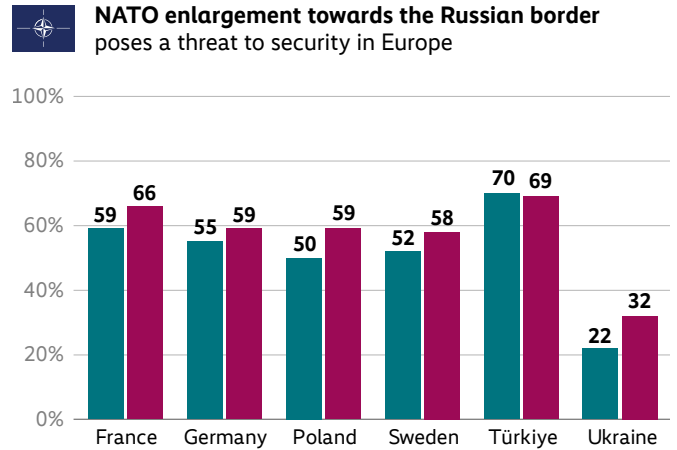
- Overall, more men than women think that the NATO has become stronger since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with fairly significant gender gaps in France (11 per cent), Germany (11 per cent), Poland (17 per cent) and Ukraine (12 per cent). Men also outnumber women in thinking that the war has made the EU stronger (except in Türkiye).
- Far more men than women believe that the war has made Russia weaker. The difference is as high as 20 per cent in Poland, and significant differences exist in Germany (18 per cent), Sweden (16 per cent) and Türkiye (15 per cent) as well. By contrast, more women think that Russia has become stronger (except in Ukraine).
- When it comes to one's own country, more women than men think that their country has become weaker, and more men than women think that it has become stronger since the outbreak of war. In the latter case, the difference can be as high as 20 per cent – for example, 49 per cent of Polish men think that Poland has become stronger in contrast to only 29 per cent of women.
- Regarding the position one's country should take in the Ukraine war, men outnumber women with regard to the option of »supporting Ukraine until it wins the war«. By contrast, women in all six countries outnumber men with regard to the two other options, »remaining neutral regarding the war« and »supporting diplomatic efforts to end the war«.
- Overall, women are substantially more likely than men to think that the war has weakened their countries, as well as international institutions, and that it has made Russia stronger. This might explain why women are less likely than men to favour supporting Ukraine until it wins the war.

Women are more likely than men to take the view that the destabilisation of the international security landscape has made national and European communities more vulnerable. This is also the case with regard to their agreement with statements such as »NATO enlargement towards the Russian border poses a threat to security in Europe« and »EU enlargement to the East poses a threat to security in Europe«. They, more than men, think that rising tensions between Russia and the West increase the likelihood of new wars in Europe. Hence their higher worry levels that things will deteriorate for them, their families and their countries in the future.

Graph 13 Threat perception by gender and issue

Affirmative answers ('strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined) to the statements.

■ Men ■ Women



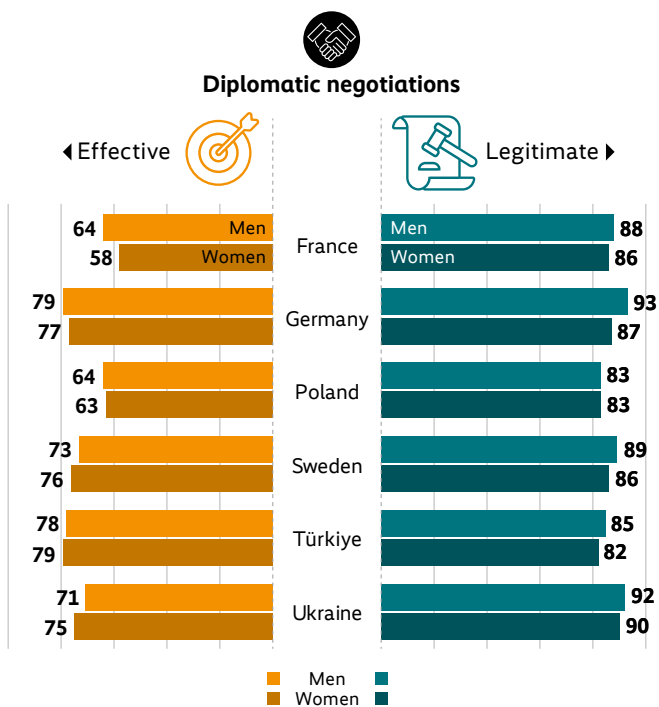
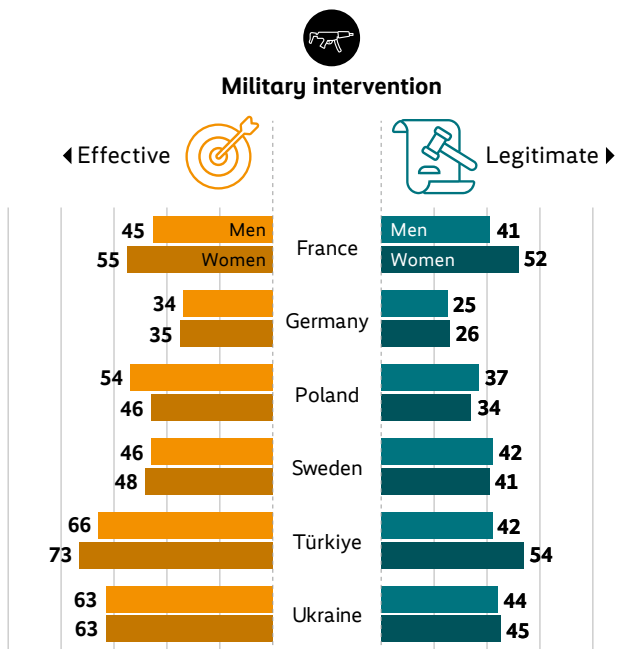
Values before cooperation?

Given that women are more sensitive to the vulnerabilities inherent in the changing security landscape in Europe, should we not expect them to support cooperation over isolationism, pragmatism over values, and diplomacy over military solutions? Perhaps not in such a time of global uncertainty:

- On average, half of the people in our sample think that US/Western supremacy is coming to an end. This includes 38 per cent of Ukrainians and 45 per cent of Poles,

Graph 14 Views on effective and legitimate means of solving foreign policy crises

Responses 'always legitimate' and 'usually legitimate' counted together. All figures in %



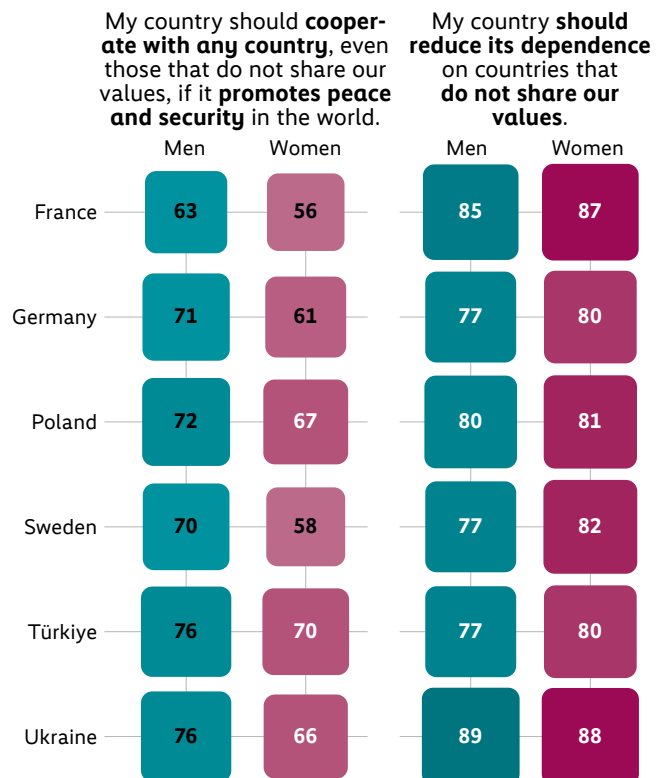
who are otherwise among the staunchest supporters of both the EU and NATO. We also see a lack of belief in and divisions concerning the relevance of existing international law. In France, Türkiye and Ukraine, for example, around 70 per cent of respondents no longer believe in the relevance of international law. In Germany, Poland and Sweden, however, the majority still believe in it.

- Regarding views on effective and legitimate means of solving foreign policy crises, women do not necessarily believe more strongly than men in the legitimacy or efficacy of diplomatic solutions. In France and Türkiye, significantly more women than men believe in the legitimacy, as well as in the efficacy of military solutions (Graph 14).
- Opinions on international cooperation lead to an important finding in terms of values. Responses to the statement »my country should cooperate with any country, even those that do not share our values, if it promotes peace and security in the world« show a consistent gender gap in the entire sample: men outnumber women in terms of agreement, whereas women outnumber men with regard to the »strongly disagree« option.

- Reactions to the statement »my country should reduce its dependence on countries that do not share our values« show that women are more attached to collaboration based on shared values and independence from countries with clashing values. It follows that values are more important for women, and that men appear to be more pragmatic (Graph 15).

Graph 15 Gendered preferences on international cooperation

'Strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined. All figures in %



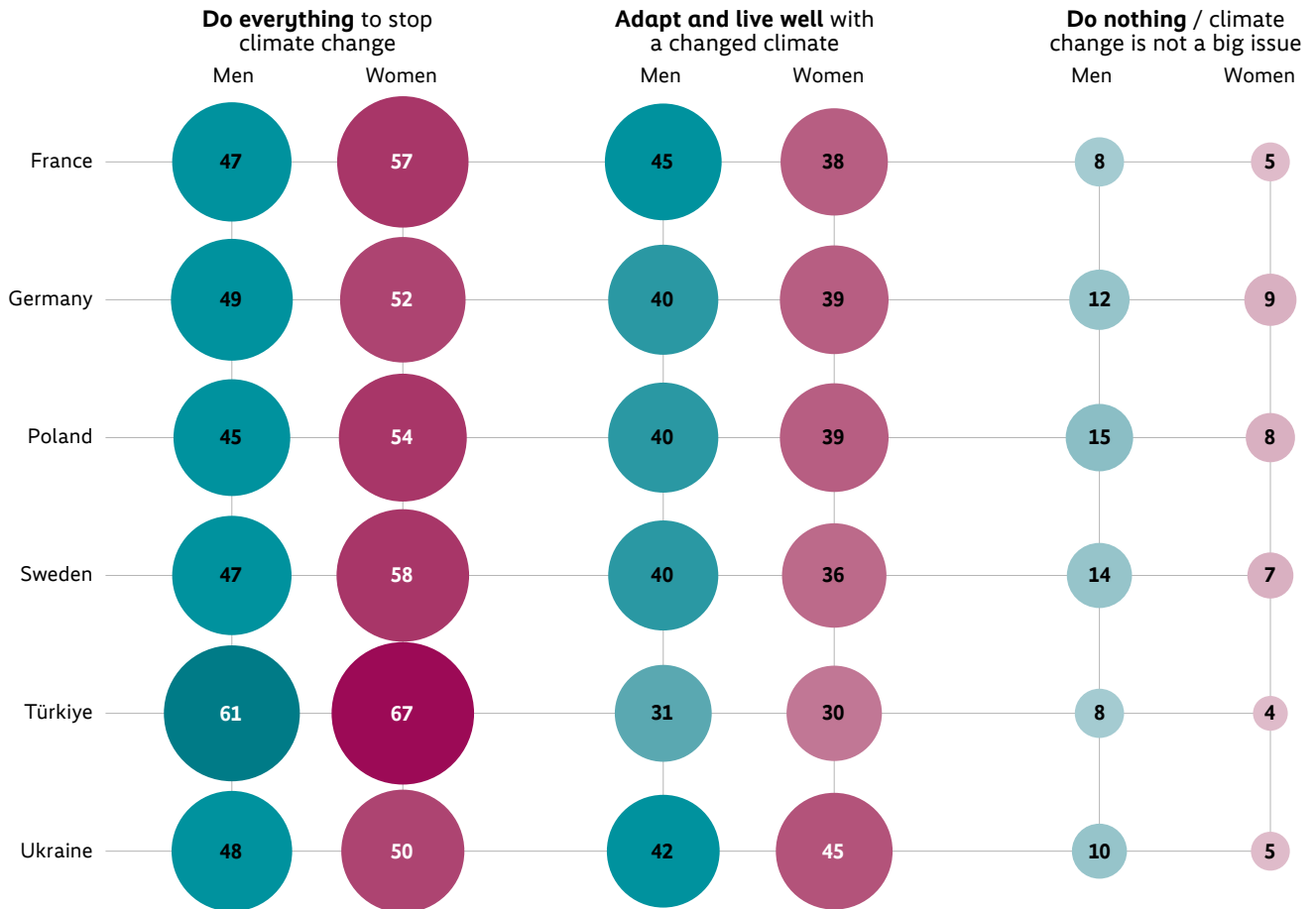
Climate blues

Men and women in our sample broadly accept that climate change poses a serious challenge to global peace and security. In order to analyse the gendered dynamics of isolationism vs international cooperation more deeply, we shall

return to climate change, an issue about which women worry greatly.

Graph 16 Gendered preferences on the course of climate change

All options recorded. All figures in %



Women’s greater concern about climate change correlates strongly with a drive to address the problem more actively, as well as a firmer belief that addressing climate change early and decisively represents a unique opportunity to transition towards a fairer and healthier society. Women outnumber men in choosing the option »we should do everything we can to stop climate change«, whereas men substantially outnumber women in choosing »we do not need to do anything because climate change is not a big issue«.

Women’s stronger support for tackling climate change more assertively, however, does not translate into a stronger endorsement of international cooperation as opposed to isolationism when considering concrete ways of dealing with it.

→ In general, international collaboration on tackling climate change regardless of rivalries in other areas is widely supported by men and women alike. At the same time, women show no less support than men for isolationism in the form of prioritising secure national borders and competition in the global market for natural resources and new technologies to mitigate the instabilities caused by climate change.

→ As in the case of addressing foreign policy crises, national and geopolitical differences prevail over gender differences on the issue of climate change. Poland, Türkiye and Ukraine represent the economically poorer half of our sample for whom international collaboration runs the risk of financial and political dependency on wealthier partners. Their drive towards isolationism is stronger than in the wealthier half. In Türkiye, more than 40 per cent of men and women »strongly agree« with securing borders and competing for natural resources and new technologies.

→ Responses to the statement that rich countries should protect poor and vulnerable countries from the impacts of climate change point to another geopolitical fault line in the sample. Türkiye and Ukraine, both non-EU members with less economically stability than the other countries in the sample, show the highest level of agreement with this suggestion. By contrast France, Germany, Poland and Sweden, all EU member states involved in legally binding relationships of financial dependency within the EU, show less agreement with this and react similarly to each other beyond their otherwise different responses to questions around climate change.

Graph 17 Views on international climate collaboration, isolationism and responsibility, by gender

‘Strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ answers combined. All figures in %



The climate change discussion exemplifies the tension between the increasing need and the diminishing will for international cooperation in addressing global problems. When asked about their satisfaction with climate change measures at the EU level, respondents in France, Germany and Poland are almost equally distributed between the »not at all satisfied«, »not very satisfied« and »fairly satisfied« opti-

ons. Despite their greater worry level and enthusiasm for taking action, women are no less divided on how to cope with the issue. What is certain is the need for better coordination between climate and security policies, as in the future climate cooperation will probably depend on listening to others' security concerns.

The gender worry gap in context

Looking at gendered opinions on the changing European security landscape through the lens of feminist geopolitics, this report discussed the commonalities and differences among women and between men and women regarding their views on security matters. Here are key takeaways from the study:

- Overall, women are more worried than men about their immediate safety and personal and economic futures, but there is also striking variation in people's worry levels based on their life course and finances. The gender worry gap is narrower among young adults aged between 18 and 29, and wider in the mid-life cohort, between 50 and 59 years of age.
- Part-time working and unemployed people, among whom there are more women than men, are more worried about their futures. While respondents in general opt to spend limited public budgets on economic and social affairs over defence, men in the low to no income bracket and women in the mid-life cohort stand out as stronger supporters of this option.
- The gender worry gap in relation to perceived global threats widens or narrows, and sometimes is reversed, depending on the issue in question. Among the three issues of climate change, wars and conflicts, and uncontrolled immigration, women are more concerned about the first two, and men are more concerned about the third. The issues women and men are very worried about overlap with their traditionally perceived roles in modern societies: women are responsible for reproducing life and men for protecting it.
- For each of the three global threats the gender gap widens among young adults. This suggests that younger people, especially young men, are under the influence of new nationalisms and right-wing populist discourses that seek to return to a social order in which it is supposedly »natural« for men and women to worry about different matters.
- Gendered attitudes towards concrete peace and security questions, such as solving foreign policy crises and addressing climate change, are shaped by geopolitical differences as well as the political and economic uncertainties generated by the amplified global power struggle. While it is true that women tend to take a more nuanced approach to international cooperation, they also tend to place more emphasis on shared values, and they support military interventions and isolationism at similar levels to men.
- Proximity to war and military conflict, EU and NATO membership, and wealth inequalities between countries can override the differences between men and women when it comes to concrete security matters. This doesn't mean that gender is irrelevant, just that it is important to go beyond generalised assumptions about gender and find exactly where its relevance lies.

Based on these takeaways, this report suggests that women should be at the policymaking table not so much because they are more peaceful, constructive and diplomatic, still less because they may be weak, vulnerable and in need of protection, but rather because women have different interests, perspectives and needs. Without their participation no security policy can be deemed to be complete.

Towards an inclusive security policy

Conducting a gender analysis is crucial in order to determine how security policies affect women and men differently and with a view to developing more inclusive policies. An inclusive security policy should be people-centred, intersectional, participatory, attentive to power asymmetries, and integrated across sectors. Four key policy-relevant recommendation areas emerge from a gender analysis of selected countries polled for Security Radar 2025 in the context of war, militarisation and increasing global uncertainties.

Integrating security, social and climate policy in a coherent framework.

Coordination between security policy, social policy and climate policy is essential for long-term peace and stability. Increasing the government budget for defence means that quality of life policy areas, such as health care, education, housing, childcare and unemployment benefits, have to take second place. But they are all essential to human security. Governments can invest in peace by acknowledging social policy as a crucial element of security. Security spending should address everyday insecurities emerging from inequality, poverty and social exclusion. Likewise, climate policy should be reframed as a core security issue. As the impacts of climate change intensify, mitigation measures will necessarily intersect with military planning and geopolitical power struggles. Establishing inter-ministerial commissions can be an effective way of fostering dialogue between social welfare, climate and security and aligning national and European level strategies across the three policy fields.

Encouraging more complexity in security thinking.

A one-size-fits-all approach to gender in security policy is simplistic and misleading. Different groups of women have different and often conflicting interests, needs and priorities because their experiences of insecurity differ depending not only on gender but also on race/ethnicity, income, age, ability and other factors. An inclusive security policy requires consideration of its impacts on diverse social groups at the design stage. Furthermore, it is important to avoid such gendered binaries as human vs state security and emotional vs rational actors if the aim is to go beyond masculinist and militarised forms of security thinking, of the kind »women are victims and men are protectors«. Instead, public narratives and institutional practices should be promoted that recognise both men and women as complex, capable and responsible actors in peacebuilding, diplomacy and defence.

Supporting women's participation on multiple levels.

Women's participation in security-related decision-making is essential for a participatory and legitimate policy process. Institutionalising gender equality in national and European-level security councils and other policy-relevant bodies is a necessary step in this direction, but it is not enough. A bottom-up approach is needed to ensure that women's contributions are diverse and influential, not merely symbolic. This depends on women's participation at different levels, from grassroots to transnational. For the effective integration of gender into security policy, governments should collaborate with a range of actors, including women's organisations, research institutions, trade unions, and social and climate justice organisations, as well as international NGOs and global governance organisations. In addition, policymakers can support transnational women's and feminist platforms, on which researchers, activists and practitioners can share experiences and strategise together by allocating the necessary funds. This is crucial at a time when billions of dollars of project funding are leaving the women's rights sector.

Launching effective information campaigns.

Transparency is indispensable in an inclusive social policy, even more so in an age of misinformation, conspiracy theories and multiplying media beyond the mainstream. Information campaigns are necessary to communicate complex knowledge in a nuanced and accessible fashion to different sections of society if policymakers want to build trust and legitimacy by promoting participation and accountability. Demystifying decision-making processes by publicly addressing questions such as whose security is prioritised and at whose expense or what kinds of violence security measures may lead to is a powerful way of democratising security discourses. Campaigns should aim to break down the silos separating social and climate policy, economic development and foreign affairs; dismantle tropes about gendered experiences of security, such as the association of masculinity with aggression, and femininity with passivity; and bridge different levels by connecting the dots between people's everyday lives and geopolitical struggles and global power shifts. Effective campaigns also need targeted communication strategies and a reliance on different media. This is necessary particularly when reaching out to men and women of the younger generations, who often use sources of information other than mainstream media.

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