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# Spotlight on the Gender Knowledge Gap in Security Policies

*Miriam Mona Mukalazi*

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**

FES Regionalbüro  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit

FES Regional Office  
for International  
Cooperation

# Author

**Miriam Mona Mukalazi** is a Max Weber Post-Doc Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence. Her research focuses on Feminist Security Policies. Recent consultancies include the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, the World Bank Group, and the EU Commission. As an expert on feminist security policies, Miriam was invited in 2020 to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag to share her analysis of Germany's gender, peace and security policies.

# Table of Contents

<b><i>Knowledge is power</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>A feminist way of thinking about security</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Status quo of feminist foreign policy</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><i>Do women worry more?</i></b> .....	<b>11</b>
Concerns about one's personal future .....	12
Worries about conflicts in Europe .....	14
Attitudes towards military means .....	15
<b><i>Do women know less?</i></b> .....	<b>18</b>
Personal safety .....	18
Russia .....	18
The European Union .....	20
<b><i>Key takeaways: Gender matters</i></b> .....	<b>22</b>
Recommendations .....	22
<i>Policy design</i> .....	22
<i>Policy evaluation</i> .....	22
<i>Policy communication</i> .....	22
<b><i>A feminist foreign policy for Europe?</i></b> .....	<b>23</b>

# Knowledge is power

A feminist approach to security policy must address a broader than usual range of insecurities, risks and threats. Most feminist studies explore how a state can protect people from gender-based violence, prevent human trafficking or ensure equal access to financial resources and political power. This publication takes another approach. Applying a gendered analysis of the Security Radar 22/23 data for France, Germany and Poland, it speaks to one of the most crucial factors maintaining gender inequalities in the security policy sphere, the **gender knowledge gap**.

People generate political knowledge in a variety of ways. They acquire knowledge, for example, through formal education, information provided by government campaigns and

facts presented in the media. People also generate knowledge through their lived experiences. Given that people have access to a range of different information channels, a fairly similar gender response pattern might be assumed for this opinion poll. But women are less inclined to voice their opinions. One could argue that states in general struggle to communicate their policies to their citizens clearly, regardless of gender. Consequently, it should scarcely be surprising that people don't know much about politics in general, never mind recent political decisions. But the Security Radar results clearly show that this lack of knowledge, whether real or perceived, is gendered. Women disproportionately answered the survey's questions with 'I don't know (IDK)'.



- In all three countries, the patterns of women giving IDK answers are very similar. This consistently high IDK ratio strongly suggests that the gender knowledge gap is a structural phenomenon embedded in society, not an individual lack of interest or capacity, or a result attributable to French, German or Polish society.

- Women gave IDK responses less frequently when it came to personal concerns and worries. But the more specifically political the question, the higher the IDK quota among women. This pattern indicates that women are more likely to have formed views on personal concerns and be more confident expressing them than on broader concerns in the public, political sphere.

- The low IDK ratio of men might indicate that men tend to avoid an IDK response even if it might be warranted, for example when a question entails many unknown variables. One explanation is social desirability bias. Men are socialised in patriarchal societies to be knowledgeable about security policy. As a result, men are likely to guess more than women regardless of whether they possess adequate knowledge. This response behaviour indicates that men tend to answer questions in alignment with what they feel is expected of them.

What does this high IDK quota mean? One possibility is that women simply know less about security policy because they are not interested in the topic. But given the current level of public interest in security policy in Europe, we should assume that opinions about these issues are probably widely distributed in society. The gender knowledge gap is more complex. Therefore, rather than investigating solely why men express opinions with more confidence than women, the following questions need to be asked:

1. What is considered legitimate knowledge: do women know less about security policies, or do they consider their knowledge inadequate, and why?

2. Who feels more confident voicing their opinions: while the gender education gap is narrowing, women still tend not to express their thoughts, even if they do have adequate

knowledge. Do men really know more, or are they just more confident in voicing their opinion?

3. Whose perspectives on security matter: to what degree does it matter that hard security is associated with men and soft security issues with women? Do these gendered topics matter at all for people's threat perceptions?

4. Who are identified as the main recipients of information: do security actors primarily address men as a target group because they believe men are more interested in security policy?

Gender matters for how we assess knowledge about security policy, and the added value of this publication is in explaining how it matters. It is also a direct call to action for practitioners and academics. Comprehensive political education and communication should entail:

**a. diverse representation,**

**b. gender-responsive messaging, and**

**c. feminist-informed analysis of security policies.**

In pursuing a feminist foreign policy, an increasing number of states are already more open to adapting these three action items. But to close the gender knowledge gap with regard to security policy states need to provide comprehensive information to all their citizens about what living in peace and security actually means for different people in their countries and region. This publication is structured into six parts that help us to question gender stereotypes in the security context. First, we explain the relevance of investigating the gender knowledge gap with regard to security policies (1. Knowledge is power). This is followed by a brief outline of a feminist understanding of peace and security (2. A feminist way of thinking about security). The analysis then explores general response patterns among women and men (3. Do women worry more?), and in the next section (4. Do women know less?) closely investigates the circumstances in which the IDK ratio is particularly high. The article concludes with recommendations for closing the gender knowledge gap (5. Key takeaways) and an outlook on political power and knowledge within a feminist foreign policy for Europe (6).

# A feminist way of thinking about security

In this publication, 'gender' refers to socially and politically constructed roles, behaviours and attributes. As gender is a social construct, what is perceived as masculine and feminine varies in different societies and cultural contexts, and over time. Consequently, what is considered masculine and feminine may differ slightly in France, Germany and Poland. Nevertheless, in all three countries these attributes were engendered by a patriarchal system that is not limited by

borders. The social construction of femininities and masculinities continues to reproduce gender stereotypes at different political levels. To obtain a better picture of how gender stereotypes feed into ways of conducting politics, representation is a useful first indicator. Worldwide, women's parliamentary representation remains below 50%. Only Rwanda (61.3%), Cuba (53.4%) and Nicaragua (51.7%) are above that.

*The global share of women defence ministers is 12%, whereas the percentage of women ministers of social protection and social security is 45% (see IPU-UN Women map, 2023). Because hard security is still perceived as a masculine sphere, more men are represented there.*

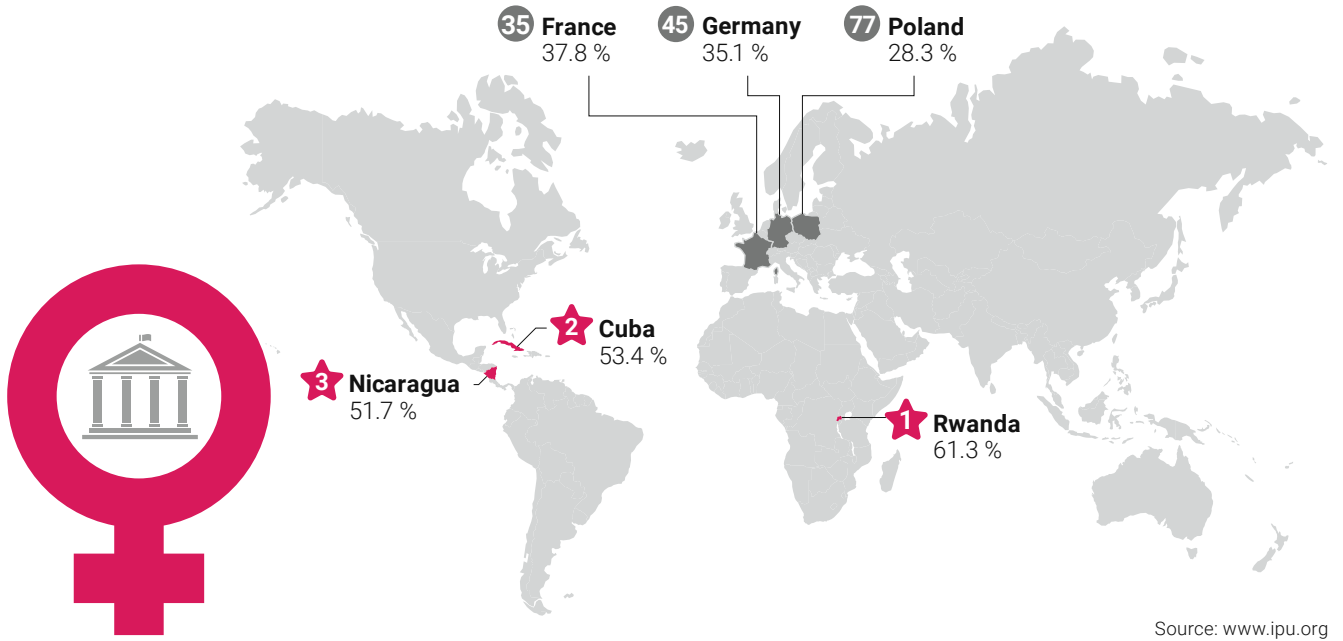
*Gender norms and roles impact not only political representation, but also political resources. Additionally, gendered assumptions continue to influence policy design and decision-making on what are considered pressing issues or threats.*

**Representation imbalances become even more evident when comparing hard and soft security policy areas.** Policies concerning hard security focus more on military means and the police. Soft security policies emphasise human rights and social protection. How is gendered representation related to the two categories of hard and soft security? The global share of women defence ministers is 12%, whereas the percentage of women ministers of social protection and social security is 45% (see IPU-UN Women map, 2023). Because hard security is still perceived as a masculine sphere, more men are represented there. This may mean that women interested in hard security policy might need to adapt to more masculine norms of political behaviour. On the other hand, more diversity at all levels might encourage more diverse people to take an interest in hard security and, by the same token, soft security. Social and political gender construction is also reflected in the provision of financial resources for hard and soft security policies. Associating hard security with masculinity and soft security with femininity may impact a state's budget. Feminist political economists argue that feminisation goes hand in hand with financial devaluation (see Bauhardt and Çağlar, 2012).

As a result, public spending on soft security is usually lower than on hard security (see UN Women, 2022). Gender norms and roles impact not only political representation, but also political resources. Additionally, gendered assumptions continue to influence policy design and decision-making on what are considered pressing issues or threats. For example, a study by the European Parliament's FEMM committee points out that domestic violence is still not taken as a serious security threat in Poland. By contrast, Polish policymakers sought to exploit the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe legal framework for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: instead of identifying domestic violence as a threat, Polish policymakers argued that the convention itself is a danger to traditional families and values. A feminist way of thinking about security helps us to understand how gender norms structure who is doing politics (representation), the policy areas to which money is allocated (resources), and whose insecurities are considered a pressing issue (rights). Feminist foreign policy is a way of incorporating feminist thinking in a state's apparatus.

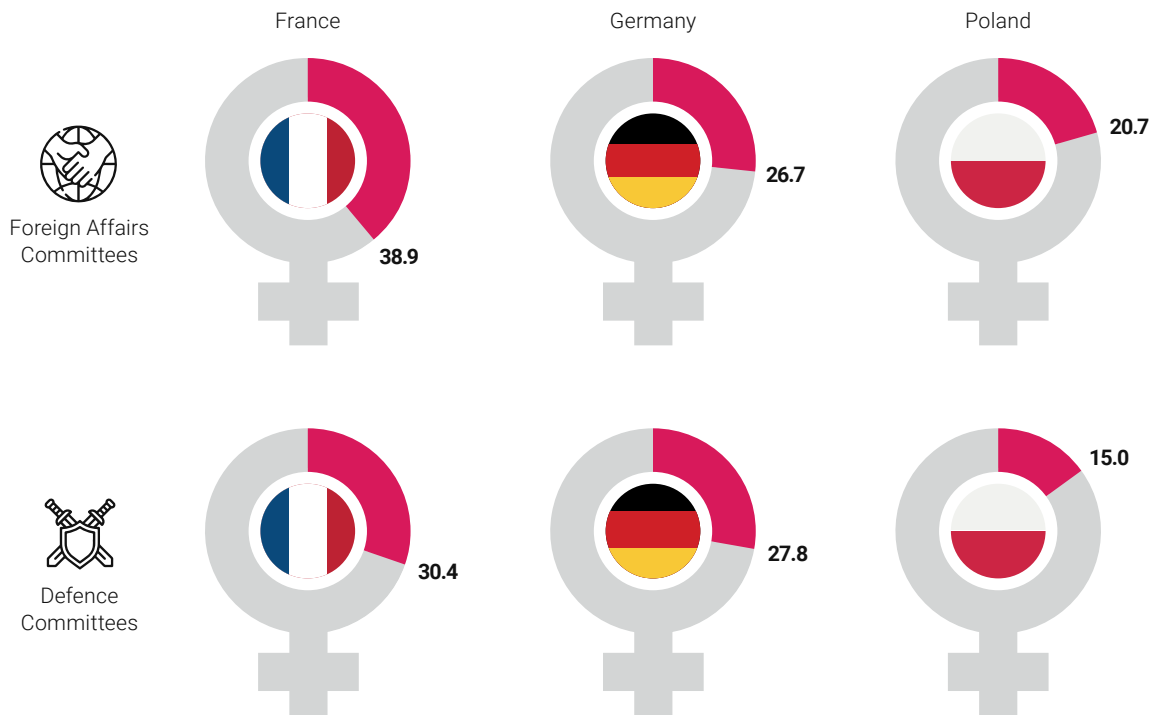
### Women in parliament

Worldwide, women's parliamentary representation remains below 50%. Only Rwanda (61.3%), Cuba (53.4%) and Nicaragua (51.7%) are above that. The average proportion of women in both houses of parliament combined was 26.5% (as of 1 January 2023).



### Representation of women in committees

All figures in %

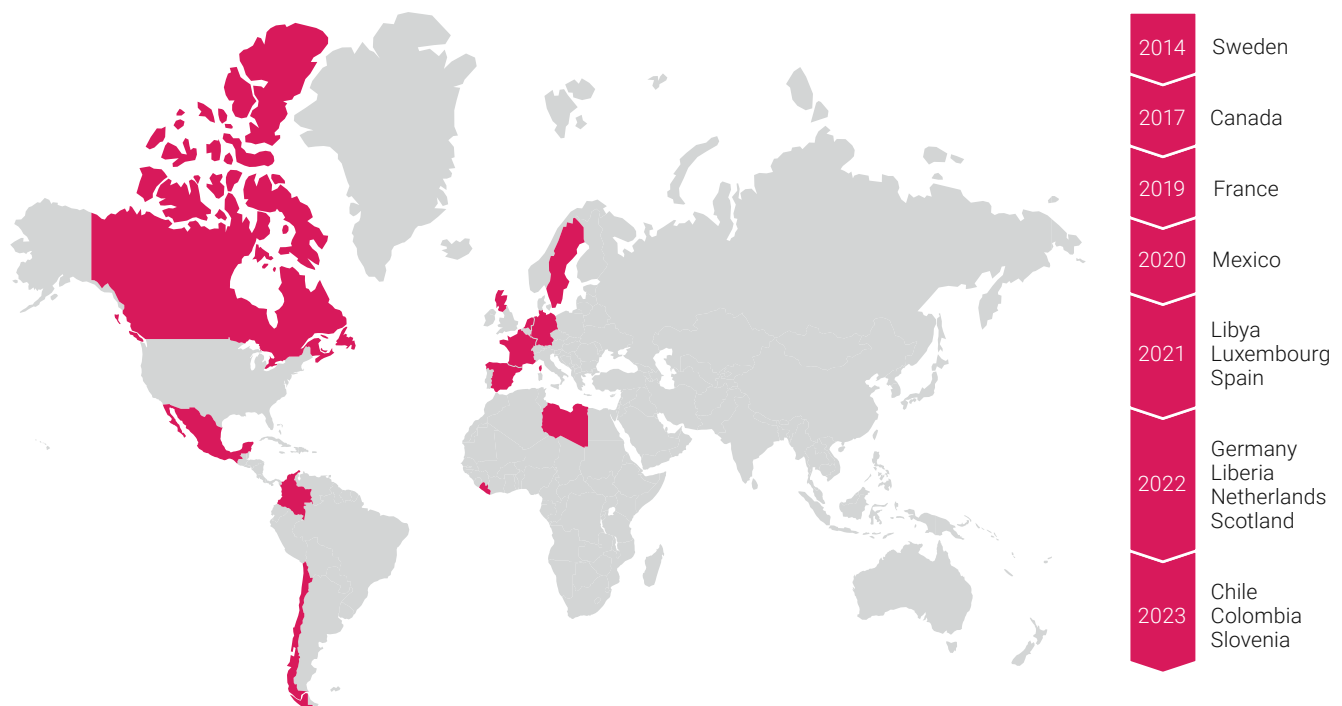


# Status quo of feminist foreign policy

Adopting a feminist way of thinking about security is not new. Feminist thinkers and activists have engaged in security issues over the centuries and transnationally (examples include the International Congress of Women Conference in the Hague in 1915, the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and the Maputo Protocol on Women’s Rights in Africa in 2003). States officially proclaiming a feminist foreign policy (FFP) is a relatively new phenomenon, however. Sweden was the first state to introduce a feminist foreign policy to the world. It is important to acknowledge that, in both theory and practice, there is no single definition of what a feminist foreign policy entails and what it should try to achieve. Rather definitions vary according to the relevant state’s aims, as well as the

particular strand of feminism academics belong to (see FES Dossier: What’s so feminist about feminist foreign and development policies). **What all definitions of feminist foreign policy have in common is that they stand for feminist values and principles.** Despite the variations, most academics and practitioners recognise that gender-based discrimination, violence and inequalities can pose significant threats to the security and rights of individuals and communities. Furthermore, feminist foreign policy states take up aspects of gender security when it comes to ensuring people’s safety, well-being and rights in relation to their gender. For a foreign policy to be feminist, however, it is crucial that it be people-centred and based on human rights and intersectionality.

Countries that have (or have announced the adoption of) a feminist foreign policy





Germany	France
Germany announced its feminist foreign policy, as well as a feminist development policy in 2022. Its feminist foreign policy has six sectoral priorities:	France announced its 'feminist diplomacy' in 2019. It has five sectoral priorities:
1) peace and security	1) social services, such as education and sexual and reproductive health
2) humanitarian assistance and crisis management	2) productive and economic resources and decent work
3) human rights policy	3) rights, justice and protection from all forms of violence
4) climate diplomacy and external energy policy	4) meaningful participation in economic, political and social decision-making
5) foreign trade and investment policy	5) equal participation in peace and security processes
6) cultural and societal diplomacy	

It is important to note that the EU and its member states have already established an important pillar of a feminist approach to peace and security, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which has been in place for over two decades. The WPS agenda was born out of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which has four pillars: prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. France, Germany and Poland are all part of the WPS Focal Points Network, and all three have National Action Plans (NAPs) on how to realise the WPS agenda, adjusted to their national interests. Poland's NAP focussed on increasing the number of women in EU missions, such as EULEX in Kosovo, NATO operations, or OSCE election observation missions. But because the NAP does not provide

any clear monitoring mechanism or budgeting guidelines, its real impacts are difficult to evaluate. When it comes to feminist foreign policy, France has feminist diplomacy, and Germany has a feminist foreign and development policy. Both countries have promised to promote gender equality within and outside their own political institutions, with an adequate budget. For example, Germany has set a financial target: by 2025 more than 90 per cent of newly committed Development Ministry project funds must flow into projects that advance gender equality. Regarding institutional change, France, for example, appointed an ambassador for the rights of LGBT+ people in October 2022.

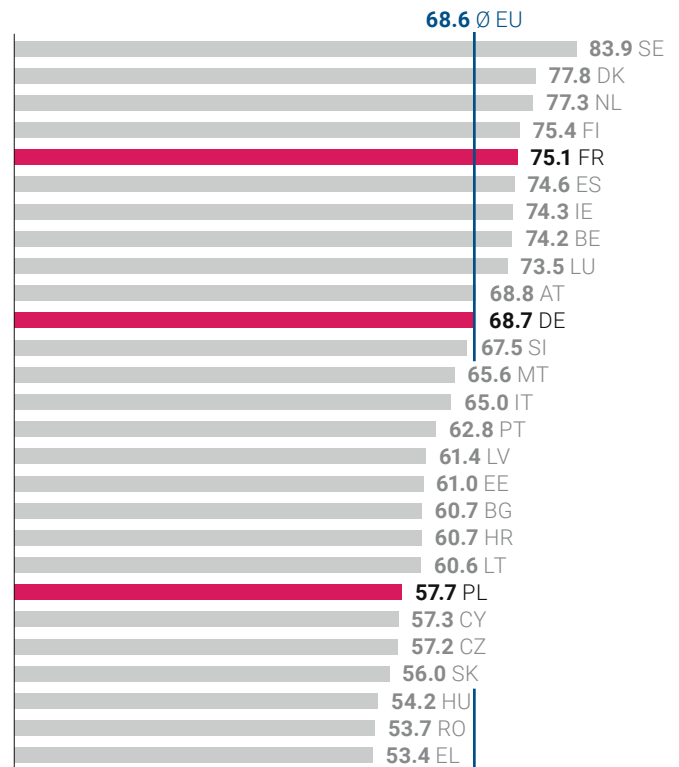
***'Feminist foreign policy should always understand human rights from an intersectional perspective, so that it does not only aim at the equality of women, but takes into account the realities of life of all marginalised groups.'***

- Yasmina Alaoui, Member of the SPD Network Feminist Foreign Policy  
(Social Democratic Party of Germany)

All these policy frameworks deal with gendered approaches to states' implementation of their security policies. To obtain a better understanding of how gender impacts the way people think about security in France, Germany and Poland, the status of gender equality, both domestically and externally, is crucial. To shed light on how well the three countries are doing in addressing gender inequalities externally the International Centre for Research on Women's (ICRW) Feminist Foreign Policy Index (FFP Index) is a helpful tool. **The FFP Index evaluates 48 OECD countries, whether with or without a feminist foreign policy, across seven priority areas: peace and militarisation, official development assistance, migration, labour protections, economic justice, institutional commitments to gender equality, and climate.** The categories of the FFP Index make it possible to compare the three countries' strengths and shortcomings (Graph below). The fact that all three have adopted gendered approaches can serve as a first indicator that they are engaging with gender inequalities to a certain extent.

### Gender Equality Index

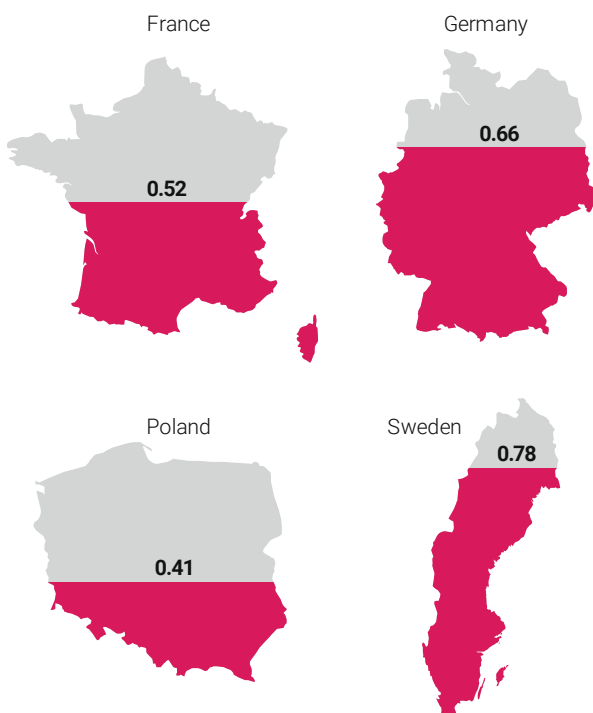
France, Germany and Poland compared with the other EU countries



Source: eige.europa.eu

### FFP Index

Scores for the Index range from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest).



Source: www.ffpindex.org

Nevertheless, the mere fact that a state as an institution has established certain gender policies does not mean that they reflect people's needs and demands in the country. The EIGE's (European Institute for Gender Equality) Gender Equality Index provides important information that enables a better overview of the gender equality status quo domestically (Graph above). The EIGE Index evaluates the seven domains in terms of progress or regress: **work, money, knowledge, time, power, health and violence.** For this reason, it is vital to consider both the domestic and foreign situations as regards gender equality because **a state's external policies can only be as feminist as they are at home.** Taking into account the numerous domains in which gender inequality exists in a society, the following section dives into what people in France, Germany and Poland actually think about security policies and the degree to which there are gender differences.

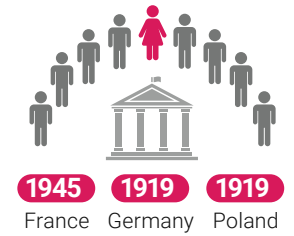
# Do women worry more?

According to the Security Radar, women worry differently. This implies that the ways in which women are socialised in a patriarchal society result in differences in their worries and concerns. A gender analysis explores the assumption that women tend to focus more on personal insecurities and the safety and well-being of children and others in their care, and less on security threats at the state level. This is based on historically developed societal expectations of women as concerned with

private matters, while men are supposedly more concerned with politics. This division becomes evident in relation to the right to vote and hold political office. In all three countries, for a very long time only men enjoyed these rights, and women had to fight for their right to participate in the public and political sphere (France: 1945; Germany: 1919; Poland 1919). This section discusses the degree to which this historical legacy still matters today.

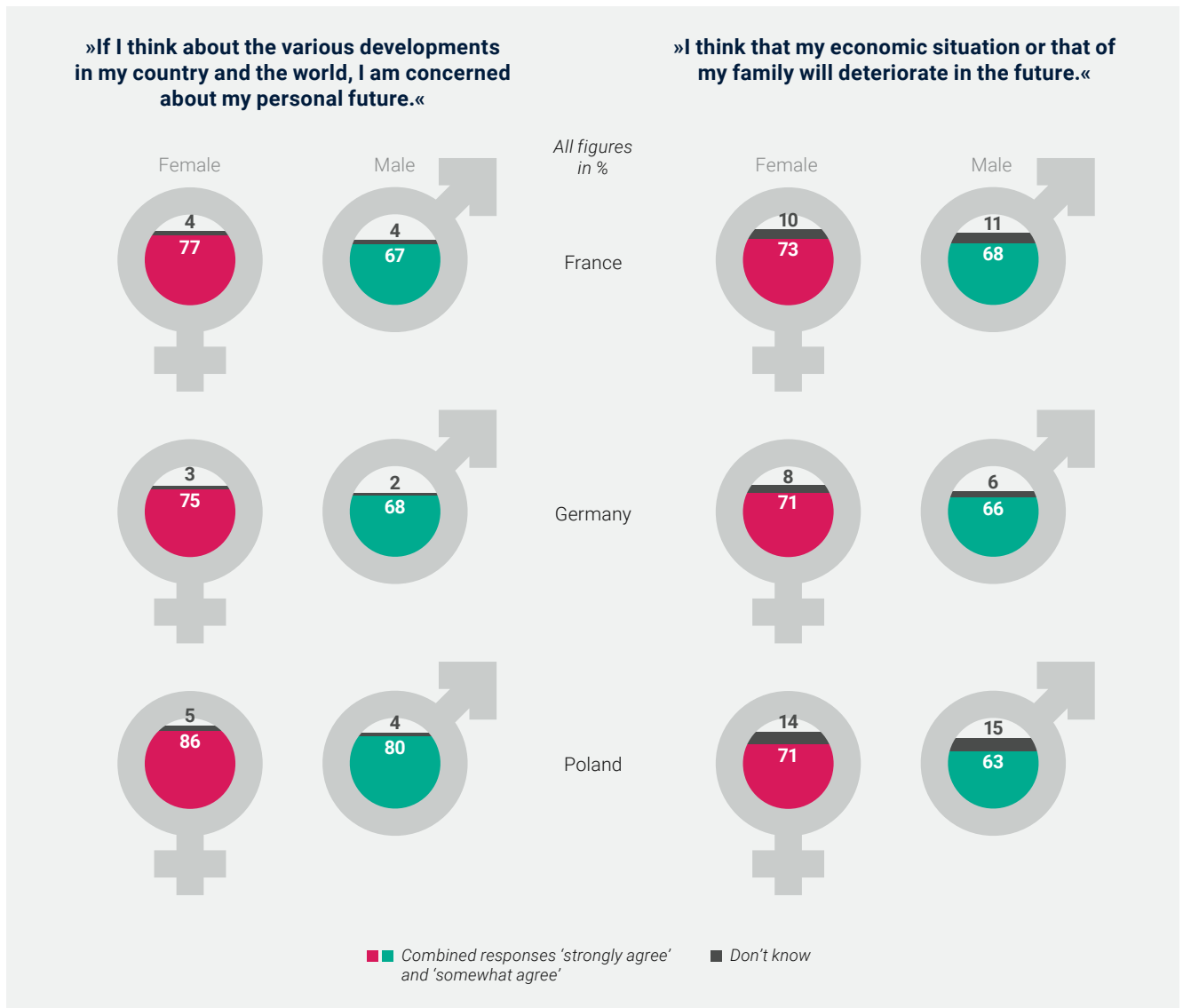
## First women in parliament

The year in which women first entered parliament.



Source: data.ipu.org

Figure 1: People's concerns about their personal future



## Concerns about one's personal future

The data for 2022<sup>1</sup> show that, in general, women worry more than men about their personal future and economic security in all three countries. Today's multiple crises – such as the global pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the climate crisis – clearly affect people's perceptions of future threats and insecurities. The IDK quota is very low in all three countries, regardless of gender. This means that people have an opinion, are confident in stating it and do not find the question difficult.

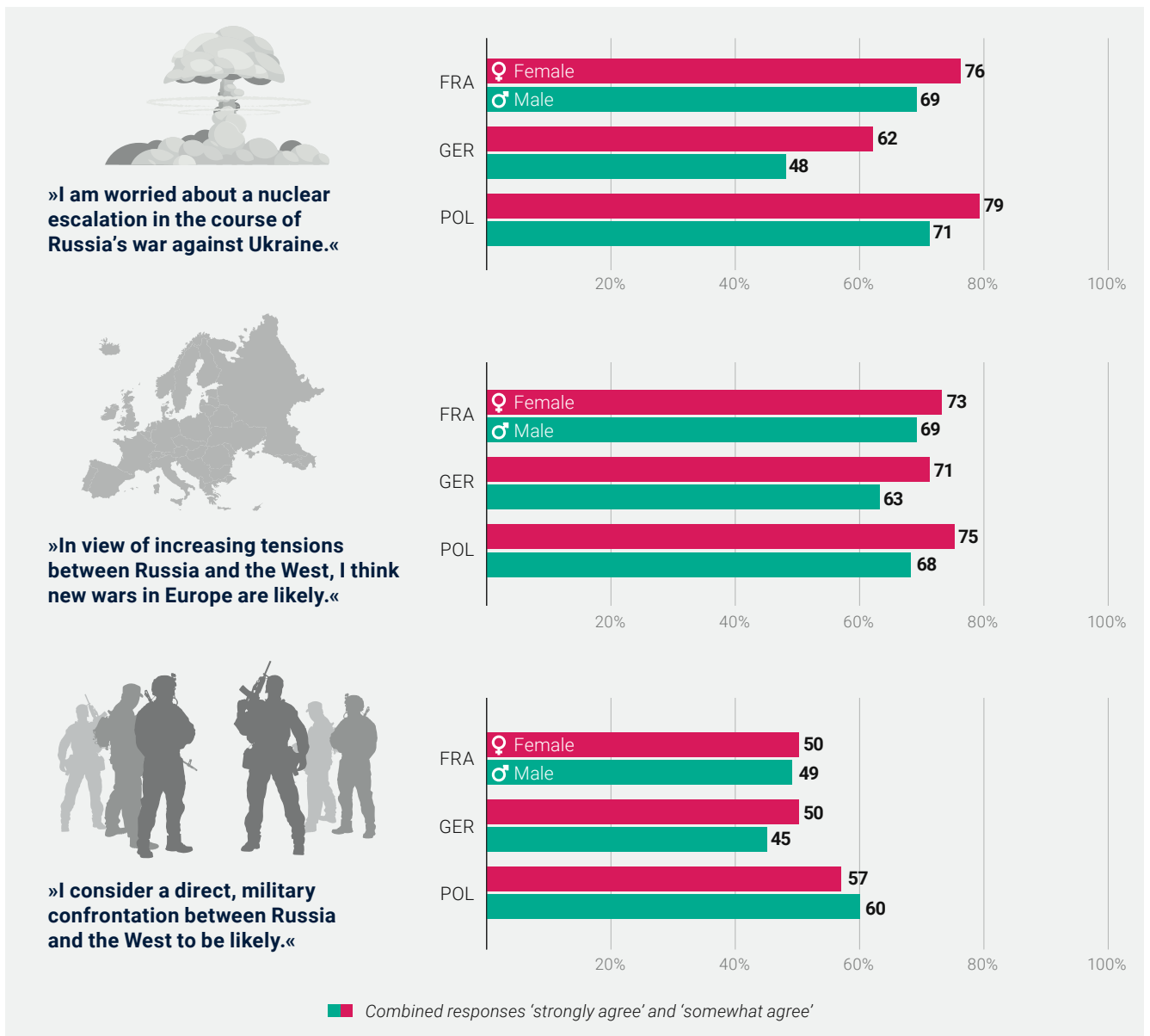
It is striking that women in all three countries show more concern about the impact of these insecurities on themselves and their families (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). One reason could be that women's role in society is still predominantly that of caretakers who are worried about what they perceive as threats to themselves and their family's well-being. The data also show that women on lower incomes worry more. Financial instability intensifies the risk of insecurity, and women are disproportionately affected by poverty (see UN Women Database). As a result, women worry more about their economic situation because they are structurally at a higher risk of being exposed to poverty (see Figure 2).

What are the implications if the public political sphere is still considered a man's domain and the private sphere a woman's domain? As the Security Radar data show, it affects which topics women and men tend to worry about. The historical discrimination of neglecting women's right to participate might have diminished since women finally achieved their voting rights, but it still feeds into the harmful assumption that the political sphere is a man's world in which important decisions are being made, while the private sphere is a woman's world concerned with less important everyday caregiver duties. While societal patterns may be discernible, it is essential to approach the topic with sensitivity and recognise the diversity of experiences. People's worries and concerns vary greatly based on personal experiences, cultural influences and individual traits. An emphasis on personal insecurities does not necessarily indicate a lack of awareness or concern about broader security problems; rather, it may reflect the immediate impact these insecurities have on individual well-being and daily life.



<sup>1</sup> The data for Security Radar 2023 were collected in October 2022. The data it is being compared to were collected in September and October 2021. More information on data collection can be found in the Security Radar 2023 report and the Security Radar 2022 report.

Figure 2: Worries about conflicts in Europe



## Worries about conflicts in Europe

*While men are more likely to die during conflicts, women die more often of indirect causes after conflicts.*

*Peace-time gender inequalities are intensified during conflict.*

Russia's war against Ukraine instigated a 'Zeitenwende' in security policy in all three countries. The Security Radar survey dives into the concrete question of the extent to which people in France, Germany and Poland perceive Russia's invasion as a threat to their lives in Europe. The data suggest that people in general are worried about wars and conflicts (see Figure 1-4). They are worried because all genders are exposed to violence during war. Research shows that while men are more likely to die during conflicts, women die more often of indirect causes after the conflict (see Ormhaug, Meier and Hernes, 2009). In most cases (see Figure 1), there are significant differences between the opinions of women and men. For example, 62% of women in Germany worry about a nuclear escalation in the course of Russia's war against Ukraine, whereas only 48% of men do (see Figure 4). In short, men worry less about wars and conflicts and women more.

Two aspects in particular can help us understand this: First, **women and marginalised groups in conflict situations are exposed to multiple forms of insecurity** because peace-time gender inequalities are intensified during conflict.

For example, gender-based violence increases during conflicts and maternal mortality is exacerbated by the lack of adequate health infrastructure. Moreover, if women are forced to flee within or outside the country, they are exposed to sexual and economic exploitation (see UN Women). Women are particularly affected by all these factors, especially when it comes to threats.

Second, **in patriarchal societies, men are conditioned to be stronger and not to voice their fears and emotions**. This may show up in the data as men professing to worry less or being less inclined to express their concerns. Furthermore, deeper investigation of gender differences with regard to worries and concerns reveals another layer of threats that are often overlooked, such as women soldiers dying in battle, and male victims of rape used as a weapon of war. As both kinds of threat fall outside traditional gender norms, they tend to go under the radar and receive less attention.

In conclusion, if women and men worry differently, is there also a difference in what they consider effective political means to tackle threats?

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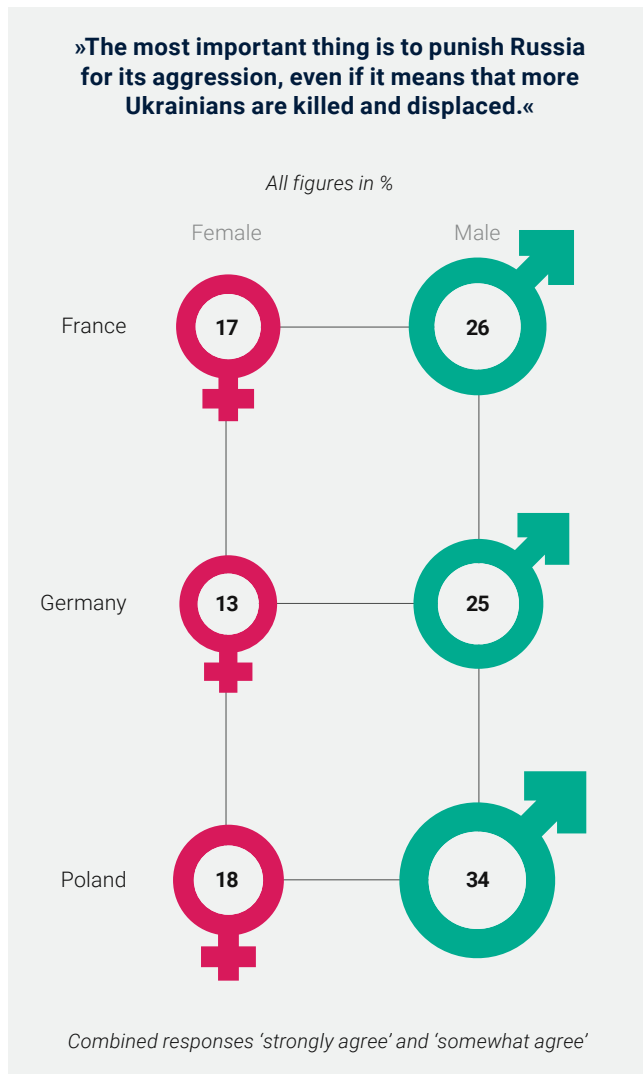
## Attitudes towards military means

Historically, masculinity has often been associated with military virtues, such as strength, courage and the ability to protect. In many societies, **there is a cultural expectation that men participate in military service, and military organisations tend to emphasise stereotypically masculine traits**. Historically developed assumptions concerning masculinity are still well reflected in today's armed forces and security policy. Consequently, some women may be less inclined to have positive attitudes towards the military, viewing it as a vehicle for hy-

per-masculine violence instead of a means of ensuring peace and stability. This attitude is also mirrored in Security Radar 2022 (see Figures 5-7). In all three countries, men are more willing to accept the death and displacement of people in Ukraine if it serves to bring about the punishment of Russia (see Figure 5). There is also a stronger tendency among men towards (re-)armament and the export of weapons. Almost the majority of men are in favour of providing more weapons to Ukraine, whereas only one-third of women agree (see Figure 6).

*In all three countries, men are more willing to accept the death and displacement of people in Ukraine if it serves the punishment of Russia (see Figure 5).*

Figure 3: Attitudes towards military means



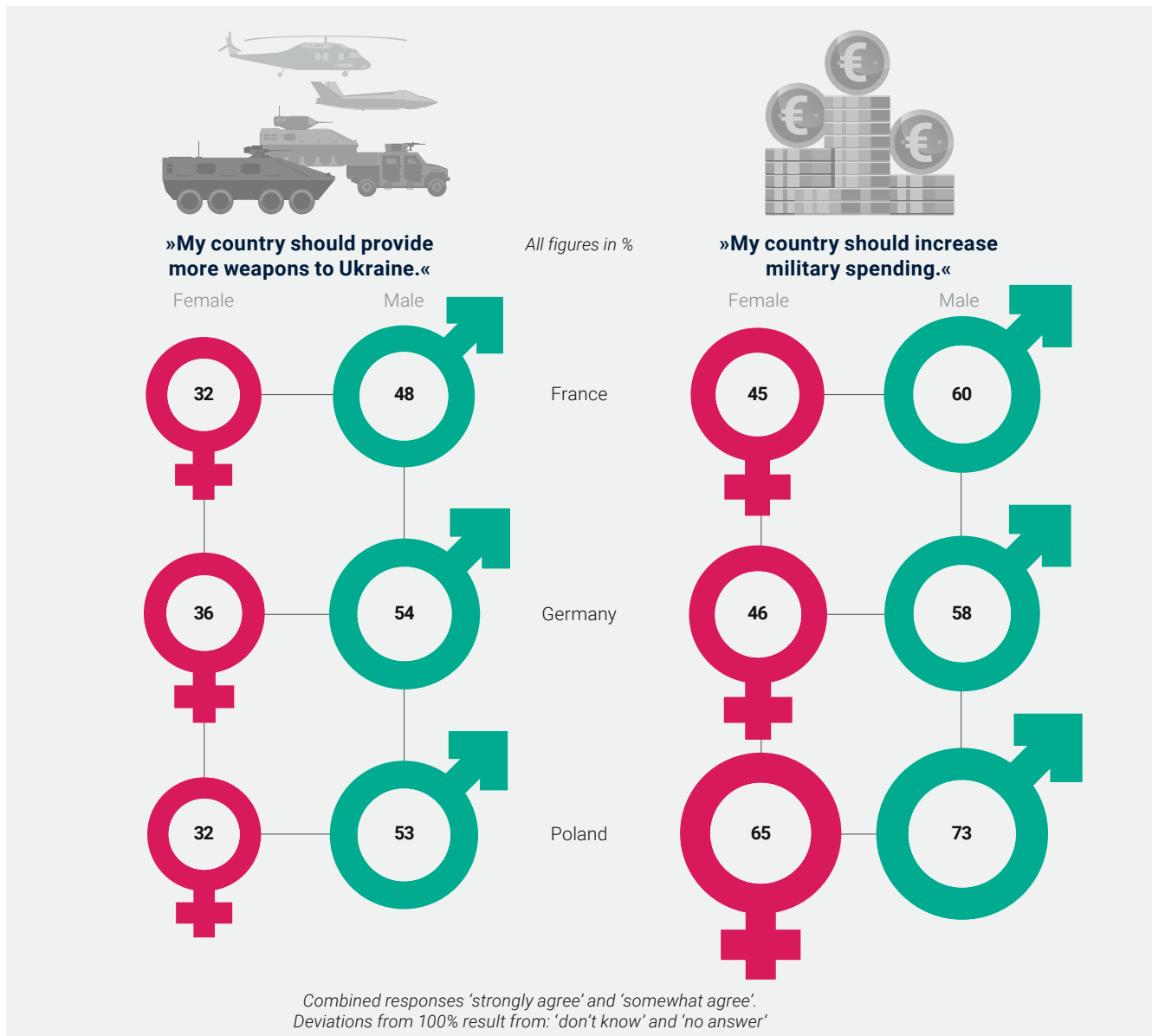
Although the overall difference between women and men remains huge when it comes to military spending – for example, in France, 60% of men are in favour of increasing military spending in contrast to only 45% of women – in all three countries there is more enthusiasm for investing in their own country's military capacity than for providing weapons to a third country, in this case, Ukraine. This response pattern suggests that people are – currently – less reluctant to pursue militarisation when it comes to the defence of their own country's borders. Considering the significant difference between women's and men's attitudes towards militarisation, one conclusion could be that women, on average, tend to favour a values-driven foreign policy, diplomatic solutions, peaceful negotiations and nonviolent strategies for addressing international disputes. This tendency is often explained by the gender stereotype of women as more peaceful than men. This explanation neglects the fact that women may be violent, too. They have been involved in ethnic cleansing, right-wing terrorism, and the torture of prisoners during armed conflicts. Women's assumed tendency to favour more diplomatic solutions is rather linked to expectations of being a woman in patriarchal societies. Although for some women, gender inequalities are shrinking, traditional gender roles remain heavily embedded in France, Germany and Poland. Among other things this reproduces the stereotype of women as nurturing, caregiving and empathetic. These social expectations may be why women put more emphasis on promoting diplomatic negotiations rather than investing in military capabilities (see Figures 8 and 9). When it comes to military interventions and sending troops, Poland's women present an interesting case

(see Figures 10 and 11). Although an overall majority in Poland disagrees with sending troops to Ukraine (see Figure 10), the data suggest that Polish women disagree less than Polish men. In short, Polish women are more in favour of sending troops. This contrasts with the gender stereotype that all women are biologically more peaceful and therefore less in favour of military means. Despite the high percentage of women who disagree, the proportion of those stating 'I don't know' must be mentioned to obtain a fuller picture of the responses. Compared with 16% of men, 27% of Polish women answered the question of sending troops 'I don't know'. This surpasses the 23% of women who agreed. Furthermore, it is not radically lower than the 46% who disagree. This high IDK ratio indicates that women in Poland do not feel they have sufficient knowledge on this matter, although their perception

might be mistaken. The extremely high IDK ratio for this question is not country-specific. In France and Germany, the IDK ratio for this question is very high among women (see Figure 11). Their response pattern reveals the basic thrust of feminist analysis, interrogating stereotypes and power structures. These examples highlight two vital aspects when it comes to analysing people's knowledge of security policies from a gendered perspective.

First, the knowledge gap between women and men is not a country-specific phenomenon or unique to specific questions. It attests to the roots of structural gender dynamics in patriarchal societies. The extent to which the IDK ratio varies across thematic areas is therefore further explored in the following sections.

Figure 4: Attitudes towards providing weapons and military spending



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2586954/69c53af3e1091082535f8c5b42b1d14f/hastrup-data.pdf>

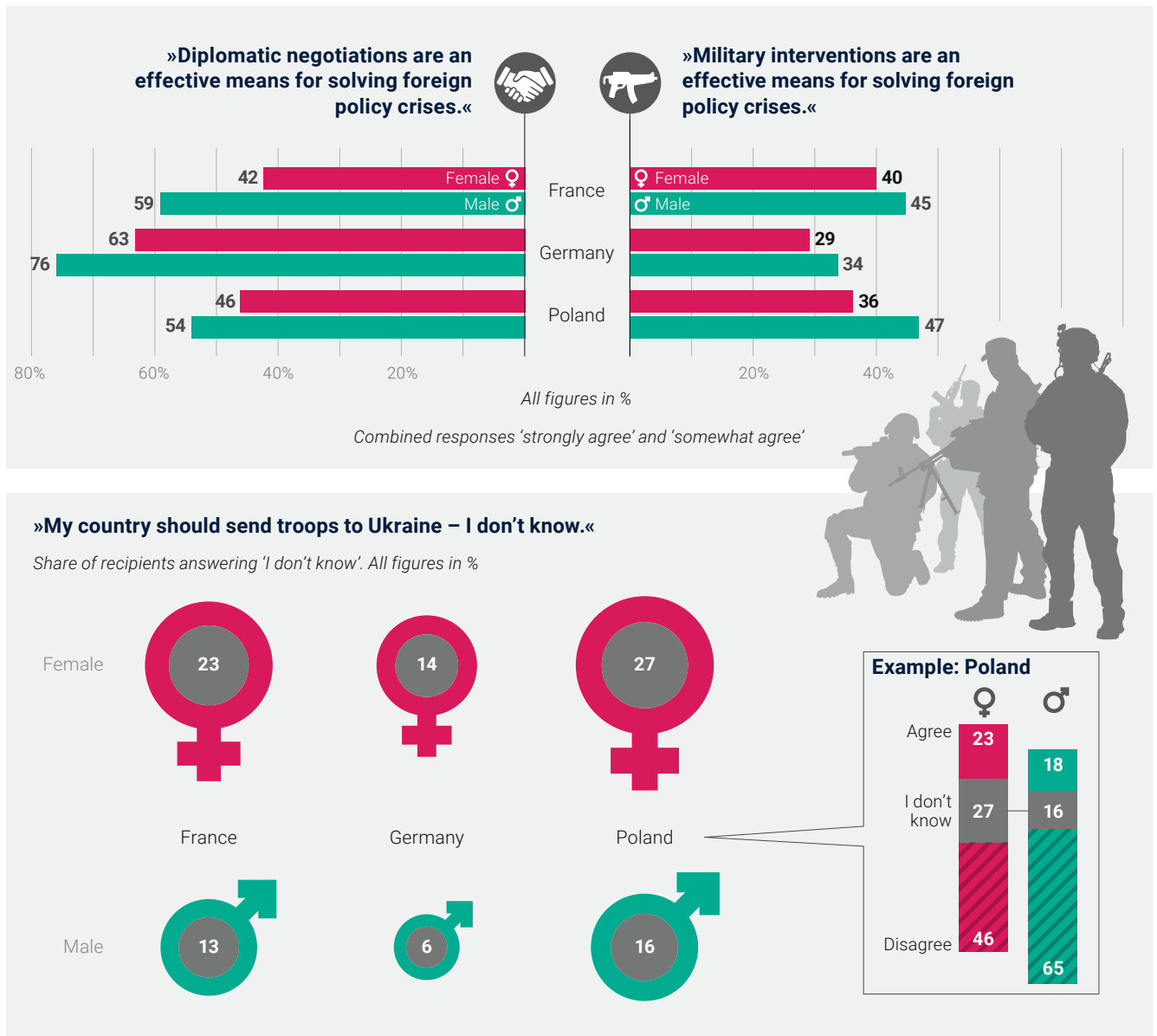


Second, the previous examples pointed out that women are not a homogenous group and do not automatically respond in accordance with their socially assigned role. Rather their socio-political context and lived experiences inform their attitudes towards security policy. Consequently, people-centred security policies need to analyse the roots, dynamics and impacts of gendered needs to be able to take into account the complexity of lived realities. This is also the case regarding women's attitudes towards the military as an instrument of foreign and security policy. When it comes to a feminist approach to security, Toni Hastrup picks up on how feminist foreign policy can tackle these complex lived realities when Europe is facing multiple crises and conflicts.

**‘Despite multiple crises in Europe, peace over militarism must be the ideology that drives action in this area. This, to my mind, does not preclude self-defence through military means. It does, however, demand that the default for ending the conflict is not violence and that alternatives are constantly sought so that the most marginalised get justice.’<sup>2</sup>**

- [Professor Toni Hastrup, University of Manchester](#)

Figure 5: Attitudes towards effective means for solving foreign policy crises



# Do women know less?

While it's impossible to answer this question, our data show that women's perceptions of their own knowledge are influenced by gendered assumptions. In all three countries, women historically have been excluded from fields related to security and defence (see SheCurityIndex). This gendered socialisation has affected how women internalise the belief that they have less knowledge or expertise in these areas than men. When women generally do not see other women in leadership positions in the security sector, they may feel less confident in their own understanding and contributions to security policy discussions. Men have traditionally dominated security policy discussions in both academic and policymaking circles. This dominance created an environment in which women's voices were marginalised or excluded, leading to a biased perception that their knowledge or expertise is less substantial. Women may feel less inclined to participate in these discussions, reinforcing the belief that they have less knowledge about security policies. This phenomenon is also mirrored in the responses to the Security Radar. This section investigates which questions have resulted in high rates of IDK responses among women. Do women answer 'I don't know' more often if a question is formulated more abstractly? Is there a difference in women's response behaviour if an answer requires profound knowledge of security institutions, their mandates or their objectives?

## Personal Safety

In all three countries, the IDK quota for the question 'Personally, I feel safe in my immediate surroundings' is very low and almost always similar among women and men. The data indicate higher confidence in assessing one's own sense of safety in the immediate environment among both genders (see Figure 12). One reason could be that the answer is affected by the respondents' daily, lived experiences. There is no requirement for specific knowledge about security policies, political mandates, or foreign policy instruments and their implications to answer this question. The fact that women's IDK Quota is as low as men's is therefore in line with the assumption that women perceive themselves as knowledgeable when it comes to security in their immediate environment. The low IDK ratio raises the question of whether there is a difference regarding the response pattern when looking at questions outside the private sphere. For this purpose, the following section investi-

gates the extent to which women's perception of being knowledgeable varies when questions are asked about Europe's role in dealing with threats, specifically with Russia's war against Ukraine.

## Russia

The IDK quota among women is very high in the context of assessing threats at the state and EU levels (see Figure 13-15). For example, the Security Radar data for France reveal that 31% of women answered IDK when asked about the effects of Russia's war on the EU (see Figure 15). The numbers are similarly high with regard to whether the end of Russia's war in Ukraine is a prerequisite for improving security in Europe (see Figure 14) and whether Russia is a threat to peace and security in Europe (see Figure 13). Although all three questions deal with immense threats to people's security, women feel less inclined to answer this question than the one about their immediate safety environment. These differences strongly indicate a significant gender gap when it comes to women perceiving themselves as knowledgeable or, in fact, being provided with adequate information.

Figure 6: Proportion answering 'I don't know': safety in immediate surroundings

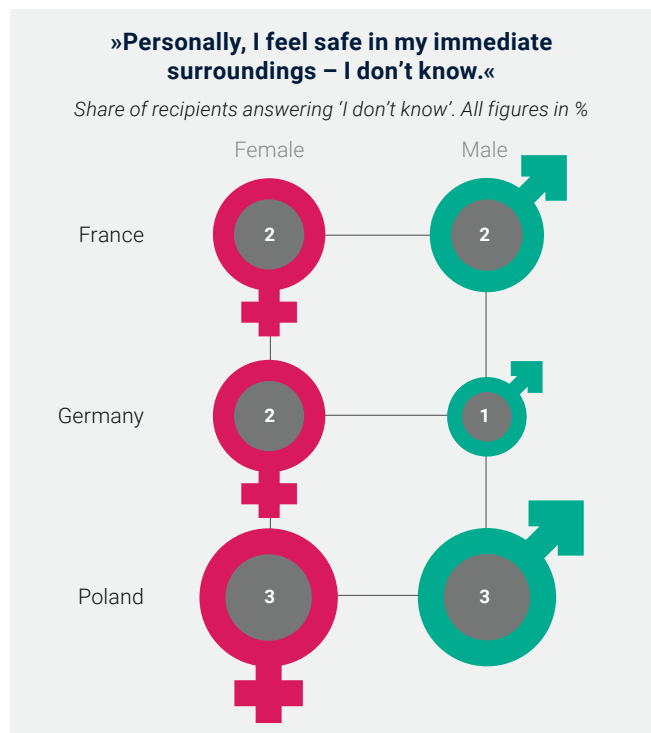
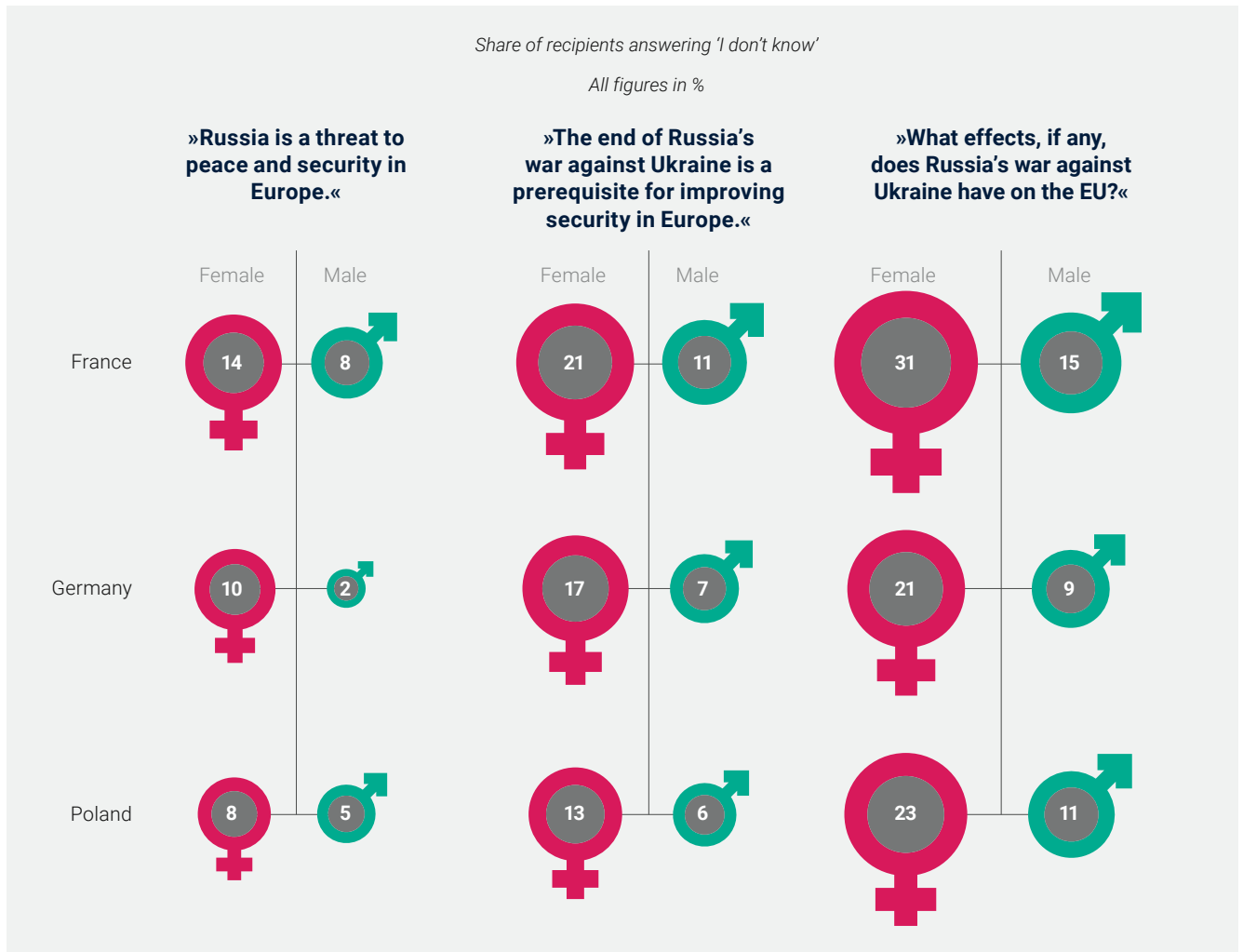


Figure 7: Proportion answering 'I don't know': questions related to Russia



Turning our attention to men's response patterns returns the focus to IDK quotas. Only 2% of men in Germany responded IDK to the question of whether Russia is a threat to peace and security in Europe (see Figure 13). Such a small IDK ratio among men indicates their strong confidence in answering this question. One might also ask why men seem to know more about Russia as a threat to Europe or why some men do not respond IDK even though they might not possess adequate knowledge. In every survey, there are questions on which people prefer to guess than to admit they lack knowledge of the topic. We may illustrate this tendency with the question of the war's effects on the EU. This question requires a prediction

of a future with many unknown variables and 'what if?' questions. Therefore, some respondents are likely to guess or answer IDK. But women's IDK ratio is almost twice as high as that of men (see Figure 15). Men's low IDK ratio indicates that they tend to avoid an IDK response, even if a question entails many unknown variables. Of course, all questionnaires face the general challenge of social desirability bias and respondents guessing without possessing adequate knowledge. As a result, respondents tend to answer questions in accordance with what is perceived as socially acceptable. In this case, **not knowing about security policy is perceived as socially unacceptable for men.**

Only **2%** of German men responded 'Don't know' when asked whether Russia is a threat to peace and security in Europe.

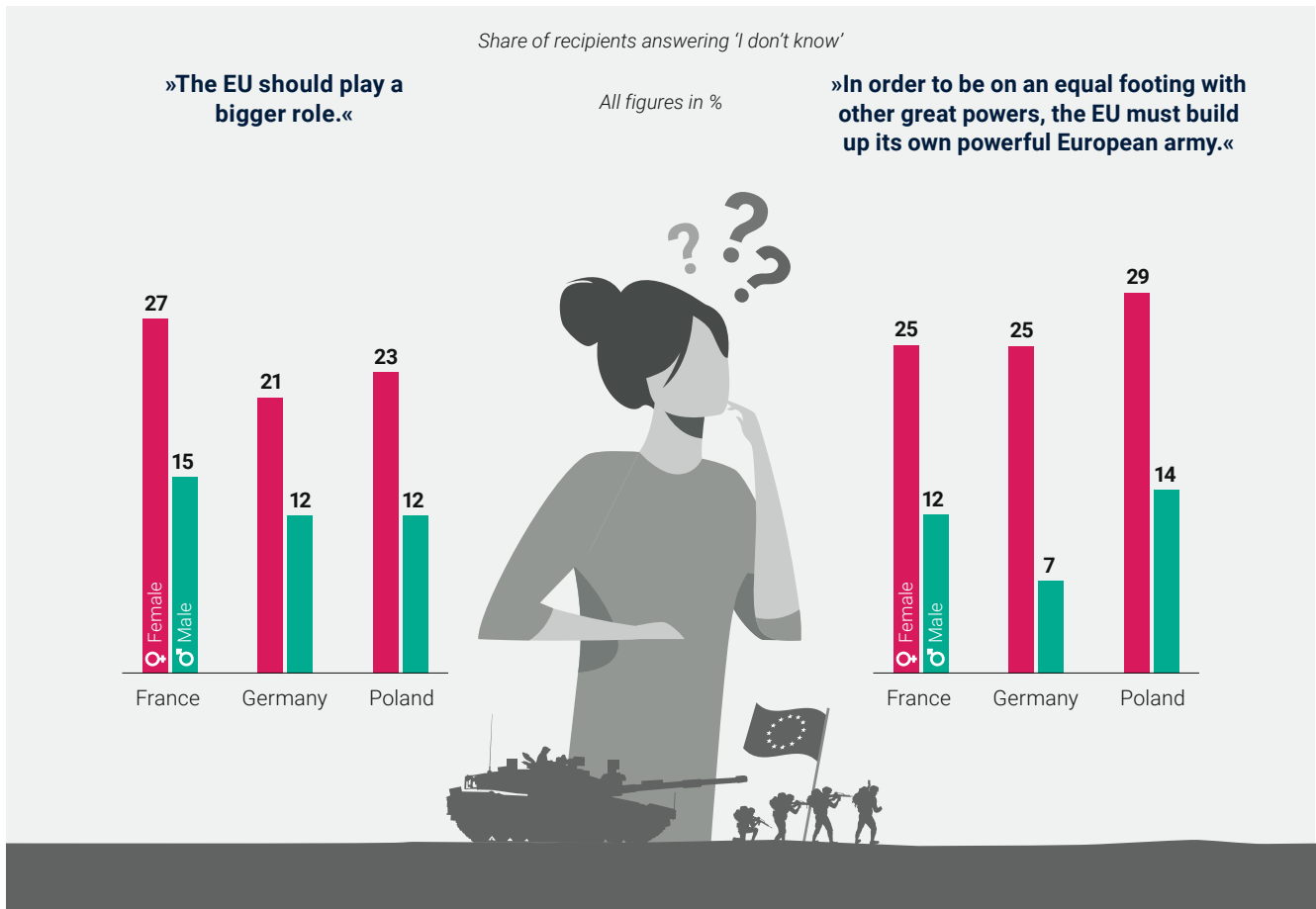
### European Union

Furthermore, the Security Radar data indicate **knowledge gaps concerning the EU's institutional set-up**, policies and purpose. This becomes even more evident when zooming in to gender differences in the IDK ratio. Women's IDK quota is extremely high when they are asked about the EU (see Figures 16–19). In all three countries, over 20% of women state that they do not know whether the EU should play a bigger role (Figure 16). The differences between women and men are even higher in relation to the EU and defence policy (see Figure 17). The IDK quota results strongly indicate that **macro-policies at the EU level are considered a masculine**

**sphere of interest**. When women do not perceive security policy as a domain that concerns them or do not think they can have an impact on it, they are less likely to seek information or state their opinions.

The IDK ratio is also very high when it comes to concrete questions about the EU's role in the Ukraine conflict. In France, 29% of women responded IDK when asked whether they think Ukraine should become an EU member state, in contrast to only 18% of men. A simple reason for this could be that the EU may not receive the same level of attention or priority as domestic matters. As this publication concentrates

Figure 8: Proportion answering 'Don't know': questions related to the EU



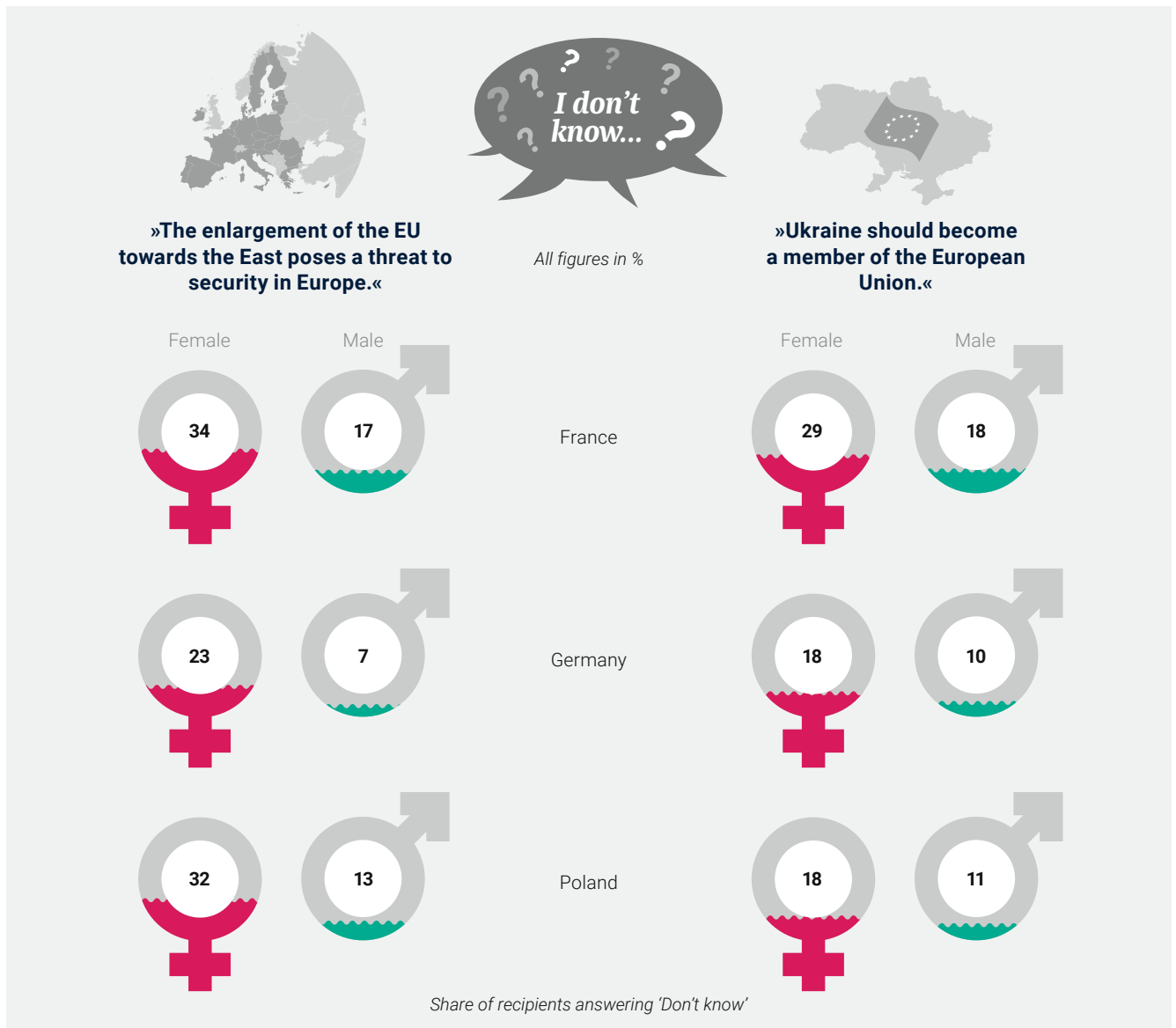
on the gender knowledge gap, another reason could be more relevant. Understanding its institutions, decision-making processes and policies requires expert knowledge. Communications around these policies are targeted towards experts and are expressed in elite language. Consequently, individuals who are not directly involved or who lack a comprehensive knowledge of EU topics know less about it.

The question of whether EU enlargement towards the East poses a threat to security in Europe produced one of the highest IDK ratios among women: 34% in France, 23% in Germany and 32% in Poland (see Figure 18). Not only are these numbers extremely high, but the gap between women and

men is tremendous. In Germany, only 7% of men responded IDK in contrast to a figure more than three times higher among women.

This question highlights both the critical aspects we have discussed in relation to the IDK ratio of women. First, in all three countries, women’s IDK response is very high. Second, the more specifically political questions are, the higher the IDK quota among women. This pattern indicates that women are more confident about expressing their views on personal concerns than on public and political issues – in this case, the role of the EU in peace and security in Europe.

Figure 9: Proportion answering ‘Don’t know’: questions related to European enlargement



# Key takeaways: gender matters

The gender analysis of the Security Radar highlights not only general gender differences regarding attitudes towards security policies, but also a distinct gender knowledge gap when it comes to what women (think they do not) know about security policies. In particular, as more and more states pursue a feminist foreign policy, gender-sensitive policy design, evaluation and communication are essential.

## Recommendations

### Policy design

Women show higher confidence in answering Security Radar questions related to personal worries and risks. This aligns with how women are still socialised today in accordance with gender roles in patriarchal societies, namely as caretakers with a mandate for participation in the care sector. When policymakers consult with different security actors, it is important that they create environments that encourage 'unusual suspects' to become legitimate providers of knowledge for security policies, including actors working on soft security issues. A diverse representation of interest groups working on social protection and social security in consultation rounds can substantially increase the probability of gathering information that reflects societies' complex intersectional realities. This approach would not only promote the development of a comprehensive understanding of how macro policies affect personal insecurities, risks and dangers, but also policy learning at the macro level from the micro and meso levels.

### Policy evaluation

The Security Radar offers insights into attitudes towards militarisation across the genders. In all three countries, women are consistently less inclined to favour military means. Policymakers should make an effort to consider the potential gendered impacts of security policies they are already implementing. This must go beyond mere virtue signalling. A gendered evaluation of existing security policies is therefore crucial. It can inform future

policy responses that prioritise the security of women and other marginalised groups. With the help of a **feminist-informed analysis of existing policies**, policymakers can ensure that security policies address diverse needs and perspectives instead of perpetuating structural inequalities.

### Policy communication

Considering the high IDK quotas in response to questions in the Security Radar, the manner in which all three states communicate their security policies needs to be revised. This gendered analysis of the Security Radar illustrates how women do not (believe they) possess the requisite knowledge of security policies. Women tend to think that security policies are not their concern. That becomes extremely evident when looking at the data on abstract and macro-level questions.

By integrating gender-responsive messaging, decision-makers can more effectively address context-specific measures that resonate with very diverse audiences in their countries. For example, in terms of visuals, it is important to showcase women in leading speaking positions. It is also essential to present examples of actual lived experiences. Last but not least, it matters what work is cited and whose words are used. This includes campaigns, press conferences or political education. Most importantly, gender-responsive messaging has to be done via different channels, in line with audiences' access and ability.

# A feminist foreign policy for Europe

***‘Criticism should not paralyse and lead to no change at all. Instead, it should animate and activate current and potential [FFP actors] to at least make incremental changes possible, even within its existing structures – changes which noticeably improve people’s lives.’***

- Fennet Habte, Research associate at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) Berlin

Feminist foreign policy definitely needs improvement and criticisms should be used for that purpose. For example, when it comes to the EU level, the people-centred approach of a feminist foreign policy offers the potential to link gender policies to the domestic and external levels. The EU has already put in place policy frameworks promoting feminist policies, internally and externally. Examples are the Istanbul Convention against violence against women and domestic violence, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, and the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021–2025. Concretely, GAP III pledges that, by 2025, 85% of all new actions within the framework of external relations will contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Externally, it aims to address structural causes of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, including by actively engaging men and boys in challenging gender norms and stereotypes. Internally, it calls for the European Union to lead by example, establishing gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top political and management levels. Both action items are based on feminist principles and could provide a foundation for an EU feminist foreign policy. Furthermore, MEPs are actively promoting feminist policies for the EU, such as Hannah Neumann (Greens/

EFA) for a feminist foreign policy and Delara Burkhardt (SPD) for a Feminist European Green Deal. Both MEPs have worked together across parties with civil society organisations to investigate the potentials and challenges of an EU feminist foreign policy. Of course, because the EU and its member states often agree to disagree, it will be challenging to reach agreement on what a feminist foreign policy for the EU should entail. The problems besetting the development of a common strategy are not unique to feminist foreign policy but rather a general challenge the EU often faces. In addition, EU member states take different approaches to feminist foreign policy. That is why a feminist foreign policy is unlikely for the EU in the near future. However, it is not impossible.

It must not be overlooked that feminist foreign policy is already a reality in Europe and gaining more attention.

As feminist foreign policy is people-centred, how, what and which people think about security is crucial. Therefore, policymakers and educators need a broader understanding of what insecurities, risks and threats mean for different people, genders and age groups. One solution is to close the gender knowledge gap by giving everyone access to information on what security policies mean and how they impact our lives.

***Policymakers and educators need a broader understanding of what insecurities, risks and threats mean for different people, genders and age groups.***

# General Information

## *FES Regional Office for International Cooperation Cooperation and Peace*

Established in 2016, the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) addresses today's profound challenges to European security. It also works closely with the OSCE on integrating young voices in European security debates and the interface between security and environment.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was a watershed moment for security in Europe and has rendered obsolete previous visions of European order. A new Cold War or even more unstable relations between Russia and the West are the probable outcome of this war, creating an environment of confrontation and containment in Europe. At the same time, planetary challenges such as climate change or pandemics

continue to threaten peace and security and require cooperative approaches.

In these uncertain times, FES ROCPE continues to develop new ideas under the aegis of solution-oriented policymaking, together with experts, politicians and policy planners from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US. The aim is to tackle interconnected security challenges, contribute to conflict resolution and strengthen the idea of common and indivisible security in Europe in the spirit of the Paris Charter (1990) and the Istanbul Charter (1999). It is our belief that organisations such as the FES have a responsibility to come up with new ideas and to introduce them into the political process in Europe.

### *Our activities include:*

- regional and international workshops aimed at developing new concepts on stabilising the security situation in Europe, dealing with conflicts and achieving lasting peace in Europe;
- a regional network of young professionals working on de-escalation, cooperation and peace in Europe;
- regular public opinion polling on security matters;
- cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions of security: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

#### **FES Regional Office for International Cooperation - Cooperation and Peace**

Reichsratsstr. 13/5, A-1010 Vienna  
Phone: +43 1 890 38 11 205  
peace.fes.de

**Responsible:** Christos Katsioulis

**Infographics:** Florian Müller

**Layout:** Shanna Danek

**Copy-editing:** James Patterson

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