

#TOYS & DIVERSITY

STUDY ON TOYS CATALOGUES IN EUROPE:
MAKING OR BREAKING STEREOTYPES?



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BACKGROUND

The project and campaign on “Toys and diversity” is a direct follow up of the European Reconciliation Package published by COFACE - Families Europe in March 2015 and a contribution to the current discussions on equality and diversity, stagnating rates of women participation in employment and persistence of gender segregation in the labour market.

EU-wide studies, European commission and NGO papers and projects have clearly identified some trends and challenges for women to enter and stay in the labour market and for men to share more equally care responsibilities. For example, informal carers, mainly women, provide 80% of care for elderly and people with disabilities (COFACE, European Reconciliation Package, 2015). To do so, they often have to leave their job or reduce their paid working hours because of the lack of care services and flexible working arrangements. Similarly, only few men engage in care professions and men’s take up of paternity and parental leave is still low. This is often because of the company culture and the stereotypical idea that caring is not a man’s duty.

Along the same lines, a very restricted number of women engage in scientific and engineering jobs, which are still male-dominated sectors. In addition, only few persons with disabilities are in the labour market and professionals with a migrant background or from minorities have more difficulties in accessing the professions of their choice. As a result, the labour market is still fragmented, with a predominance of women and migrants in low paid, low skilled and temporary jobs, the rate of people with disabilities out of work is extremely high and men cover the majority of positions in company boards and high management.

The European Commission is currently working on proposals for supporting working parents and carers, and Europe is far from reaching the employment target set in the Europe 2020 strategy to have 75% of 20-64 year-olds employed by 2020. The UN also raised concerns on the inclusion and adaptation of the labour market for people with disability, during the first monitoring of the implementation of the UN CRPD in the EU.

But what is the image that is given to the younger generations? Are mass media and marketing providing a forward looking and non-stereotypical vision of inclusion and diversity? Alternatively, are they perpetrating stereotypes?

Early years are key in the social and cognitive development of every child and the impact that play and toys have

on child development contribute to shape the child’s behaviour, interests and choices that he/she will make in later life.

Therefore, to attempt to provide some answers to the questions above, COFACE Families Europe designed a project on toys and diversity that aims to voice concerns and raise awareness among parents and families on marketing directed to children. As a an initial step, we decided to start by examining a marketing instrument directed to families like toy catalogues and, with a diversity lens, analyse how children are represented across different EU countries.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this COFACE “Toys and Diversity” research project is to understand whether and to what extent toy marketing encourages gender, disability and racial stereotypes. Due to the key function played by toys in the socialization process of children, this is a key issue to tackle, also in order to prevent children from living by stereotypes.

The distinctions we use to separate men from women, and the qualities that go into what we call “masculine” and “feminine”, are culturally defined. Culture plays an important role in the assignment of gender: gender roles are perpetuated and learned through gender socialisation and toys may be considered a type of gender socialising agent (Cherney, 2006¹; Ruspini, 2011²; Goldstein, 2012³). Socialisation constitutes the set of processes through which the values, norms and practical know-how of a society are handed down from generation to generation. It is the expression of the value system characterising the various societies and plays a role of great importance in the formation of gender identities and of male and female roles. The process of gender differentiation is supported and made legitimate by all the agencies of socialisation: family, school system, peer groups, means of communication and working, associative, religious and political experiences.

Younger and older boys and girls are encouraged to behave in different ways. They learn to walk, speak and act in the prescribed way for their gender according to the expectations of the social groups and culture they belong to. Boys are usually considered physically and verbally more aggressive, physically stronger and risk-seeking. Masculinity places emphasis on personal fulfilment achieved through qualities such as independence, willingness to risk and daring. Little girls, on the other hand, are perceived as weaker, gentler, more inclined to listen and perform care work. These perceptions are reflected in the parents’ behaviours, when, for example, they seek to give differentiated toys as presents. Model cars, trains, planes, soldiers, construction games for boys; dolls to dress and undress, soft toys, toy kitchens and little dollhouse sets for the girls.

From an educational development perspective it is widely accepted that both boys and girls will benefit from playing with a wide variety of different toys and games, whether

they are traditional boys’ toys or girls’ toys (Blakemore and Centers, 2005⁴).

Starting with these premises, this comparative European project of “Toys and Diversity” examined how/how much toy marketing potentially encourages stereotypes, not only gender stereotypes but also stereotypes linked to disability and to ethnicity. More specifically, the main aim of the research project was to understand how (and which) children are represented in toy catalogues and whether this representation changes from one production area to the other, and from one country to the other. Special attention was devoted to the analysis of the relationship between the children and the toy(s) (e.g. number of boys and girls represented and with which toys, presence of children with disabilities and presence of racial and ethnic diversity, cross-referencing with how and with toy(s) they are represented). Diversity in society has several other dimensions (e.g. religion, sexual orientation, age...) but these were not considered in this project.

The data was collected on the basis of 32 toy catalogues from 9 European countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) during the period between December 2015 and December 2016. The countries involved belong to different social and cultural models: southern European, central European, Nordic countries and anglo-saxon. The choice to include different national realities is based on the initial hypothesis that culture plays an important role in the social construction of stereotypes.

The 32 toy catalogues were selected with a view to covering three main channels of toy marketing and selling 1) Retailers and supermarkets (e.g. Carrefour); 2) International specialised toy shops (e.g. Toys ‘R’ Us); 3) national or local specialised toy shops. The choice of catalogues was based on the model of purposive sampling, also known as judgement, selective or subjective sampling. It is a sampling technique where the units to be investigated are chosen by the judgement of the researcher/research group. For this project, units (catalogues) were selected by taking into account a number of variables: their relevance to the study, their availability (online and offline), a balanced representation of the three sectors mentioned above, an evaluation of the future comparability among the different unit, the presence and quality of images of children and children with toys.

The selected catalogues were “questioned” through an analytical questionnaire produced and agreed by

1 Cherney, I.D. (2006) “Gender-linked Differences in the Toys, Television Shows, Computer Games, and Outdoor Activities of 5- to 13-year-old Children”. *Sex Roles*, vol.54/9-10, pp. 717-726.

2 Ruspini, E. (2011). “Toys, Gender Stereotypic”, in M. Zeiss Stange, C.K. Oyster, J.E. Sloan (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Women in Today’s World*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, vol. 3, pp. 1461-1463.

3 Goldstein, J. (2012). *Play in Children’s Development, Health and Well-Being*. Toy Industries of Europe. Brussels

4 Blakemore, J.E.O., and Centers, R.E. (2005). “Characteristics of Boys’ and Girls’ Toys”. *Sex Roles*, vol. 53/9-10, pp. 619-633.

the Advisory Board of the ToysAndDiversity survey and aimed to examine, in detail, specific characteristics of the images included in the different catalogues. The Advisory Board was composed of 2 academics (1 sociologist and 1 education specialist), 3 NGO representatives and the COFACE Secretariat.

A total of 3.125 images have been analysed (see next section for details). They were analysed, extracting qualitative and quantitative information, based on a questionnaire of 200+ variables, which allowed for a detailed level of analysis of the catalogue content. The questionnaire was composed as follow:

1. General questions on the catalogue: type of catalogue, number of children and adults represented;
2. Gender: questions relating to the gender equality in the representation of children associated to a certain typology of toy, per section: Housework activities and care activities; Science; Construction and building blocks; Cars & transportations and sports & outdoor; Videogames, connected toys and drones; War & Guns, Beauty & Grooming; Arts&Crafts and Music; Role-play and dress-up costumes; Animals;
3. Disability: presence of children with disabilities and connections with type of toys;
4. Racial and ethnic diversity: presence of children with various racial and ethnic backgrounds and connections with type of toys.

Through this questionnaire, it has been possible to codify the iconographic material and organise the resulting data to proceed with a statistical analysis of findings. In particular, we proceeded with a descriptive analysis of findings and identifiable trends through counting of recurrences, considering that frequency of a category is often an indicator of its relevance.

GENERAL TRENDS

The findings presented in this report are the result of the analysis of 32 toys catalogues from 9 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In each country, where possible, we gathered and analysed catalogues of three different categories: supermarkets, national toys shops and international toys shops. Findings in this report are the results of the analysis of 11 supermarkets, 13 national toy shops and 8 from international toy shops. Annexed to this analysis, a list of the catalogues analysed.

Catalogues were gathered through the Members



of COFACE – Families Europe in their countries and through the #ToysAndDiversity Advisory Board during the Christmas period in 2015, with the exception of catalogues from Sweden and the United Kingdom that are for Christmas 2016.

Are children pictured with the majority of toys?

We analysed images of 3125 children across 32 catalogues.

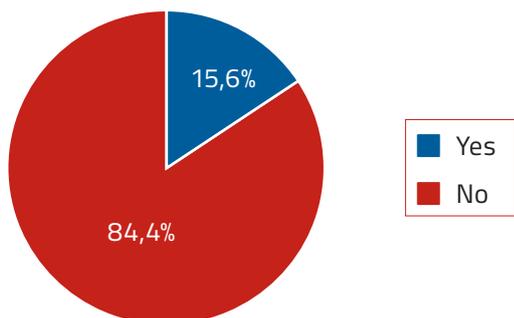
Only 15.6% of the catalogues had children pictured with the majority of their toys, in the other 84% children were pictured infrequently, not accompanying most of the toys.

We also conducted an analysis of the context in which the child or toy was pictured (e.g. background colour) and the main features of the toy itself (e.g. different versions for boys and girls, colours, ..). This was, however, a secondary analysis and the general main focus was to review how children are portrayed, in relation to the toy and to the context in which they were included (e.g. presence of boys, girls, racial diversity, visible impairment or disability, presence of groups and roles in groups..).

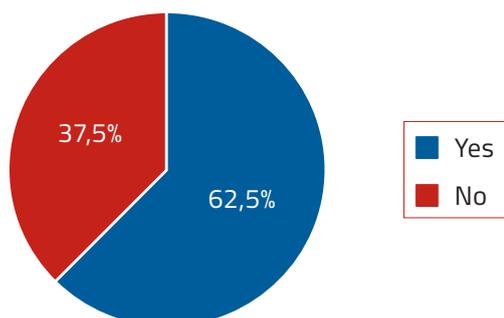
Main trends of the context in which children and toys were pictured are related to the use of colours (pink and pastel colours for girls, darker and bolder colours for boys), associations of toys from different categories in the same page, or in pages with a specific background colour (e.g. stuffed animals and dolls or beauty sets on pink pages, dinosaurs and cars or guns in darker pages) and the existence of two versions of the same toy, a “normal” version and a pink one for girls (explicitly branded as such).

Is the catalogue divided into sections: toys for boys and toys for girls?

Are children present for majority of toys?



Separate sections for boys and for girls?



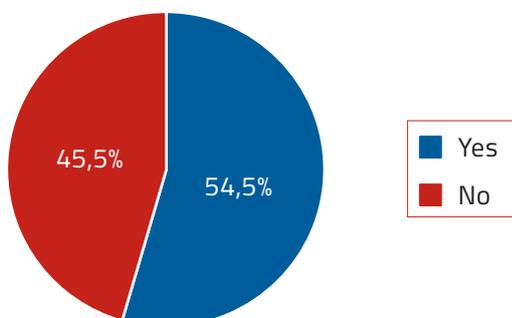
Out of 32 catalogues analysed, more than a third, 12 (37.5%), had specific sections of toys “for boys” and “for girls” versus 20 catalogues (62.5%) having no defined sections. This difference follows national lines more than typology of retailer and catalogues with a clear division in section for boys/girls all belonging to a limited number of countries, mainly in southern Europe. This is an indication that boys and girls in some countries are identified as two different markets. However, this can lead children and parents to look only into those sections and associate boys and girls with specific categories of toys and predefined gender roles. A number of the catalogues that are not formally divided into genders have, however, sections that are clearly marked by colours. Pages “for boys” have darker and bold colours as prevalent background and pages “for girls” are identified with the use of pink and pastel colours, recalling the stereotype of masculinity as strength and power vs. femininity as lightness and fragility.

However, in 13 out of these 18, adults were associated with a specific section and role, recalling a predefined and stereotyped image of men and women. A large presence of women are in the section for babies, while men are mainly represented in sections of sport and outdoor or cars and transportations. This clearly follows the image of the woman (mother) as main carer and the man (father) as the main provider with whom to play the “fun and free time” activities.

Presence of adults: are they there? If so, are they linked to stereotyped roles?

In 18 catalogues (56%) there were images of adults together with children. A large number of the images of adults were on chapter covers and only some of them were playing with the child and toy.

Presence of adults



Catalogues divided into sections for boys and girls. A number of shops who used to have separate aisles, eliminated this division that only serves the purpose of forcing boys and girls into categories: do we really need to choose what each child wants to play with?

In one catalogue, a man was portrayed playing with a little girl sewing clothes for the doll. Adults’ participation in play and positive parenting is important and beneficial for the child. Breaking stereotypes and showing positive role-models to children is fundamental to allow each child to grow up without the perception that there are predefined roles for men and women.

DETAILED TOY-SPECIFIC TRENDS

Each catalogue was analysed at different levels, in its general structure (data presented above) but we also looked in details each section that composes the full publication. Each catalogue was analysed with the same questionnaire, composed by over 200 questions, divided into thematic blocks.

Each block was thematic and contained the same questions: (1) pictures of children, (2) their interaction with toys and (3) the toys and their context. Only the section on costumes and dress-ups had an extra question on racial stereotypes. For the purpose of this survey we identified 13 thematic blocks that were analysed separately: housework activities, care activities, science, cars and transportation, sport and outdoor, videogames, connected toys and drones, war and guns, beauty and grooming, arts&crafts and music, role-play and dress-up costumes, animals. For the purpose of better underlying emerging trends, 8 sections are presented in pairs, resulting with the following data presentation:

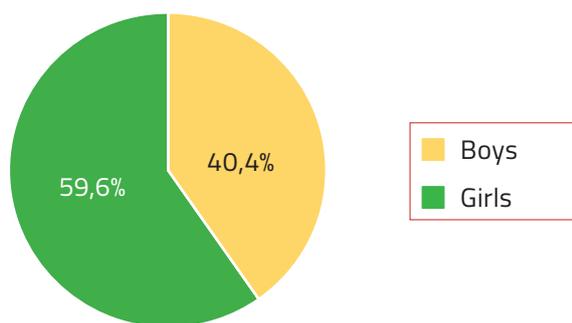
- Gender equality: housework activities vs. care activities
- Science
- Construction and building blocks
- Cars & transportations and sports & outdoor
- Videogames, connected toys and drones
- War & Guns vs. Beauty & Grooming
- Arts&Crafts and Music
- Role-play and dress-up costumes
- Animals: dinosaurs vs. stuffed animals

Finally, the two specific sections on disability and on racial and ethnic diversity present the specific assessment of these two areas. These included also a number of specific questions on intersectionality among gender, disability and racial diversity.

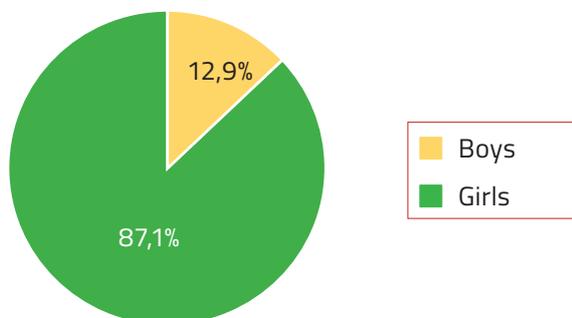
GENDER EQUALITY: HOUSEWORK ACTIVITIES VS. CARE ACTIVITIES

How many boys and how many girls are represented doing these activities?

Housework: cleaning, shopping, cooking...



Family care: playing the parent role



In the catalogues analysed, a large number of pages are dedicated to toys that refer to everyday life and activities that children see in their homes, done by their parents and family members. The number of children represented doing these activities is 443 (14% of total), of which 188 doing housework and house-related chores and 255 engaging in care and parenting activities. However, a quite clear differentiation can be observed when comparing boy and girl representation in housework and care and parenting activities. Out of 188 children playing with toys representing housework activities (mainly cooking and grocery shopping, fewer cleaning and ironing) 112 (60%) are girls. Out of the 255 children playing and feeding dolls, with pushchairs and doing any parenting related activities, only 33 (13%) are boys.

Younger generations of fathers are more interested in being involved in the care of their children but still

suffering from a lack of information and understanding, especially at company level, when they decide to take time off to care for their children. The EU average of take-up of parental leave by men is stagnating around 10% (European Parliament, 2015). In this context, the images on catalogues for children should surely convey the existing and growing interest of young fathers by including more boys shown caring and feeding dolls, instead of proposing an old model of the woman as main and almost only carer.

Concerning housework and house-related chores the representation is 60% of girls and 40% of boys, without a concrete difference among countries. However, while for some activities like groceries shopping it is possible to notice a general balance (we found images of both boys and girls playing as the customer and the seller), a bigger differentiation among boys and girls can be noted in children represented while playing with a kitchen set. It is, indeed, quite widespread among the catalogues that the boys cooking are dressed like professional chefs (hats, uniforms) or playing with a professional-looking kitchen set, while girls are dressed normally, like homemakers and play with everyday cooking sets. The risky message conveyed through these images, that could overturn the positive one showing more men involved in the housework, is that cooking and entering a kitchen for a men is a career and a professional opportunity, while for a woman is the normal routine, her assigned standard role.

DID YOU KNOW?

Only 1 out of 50 restaurants from the international award "The World's 50 Best Restaurants" is a woman. Recently, a separate list was created for "The World's Best Female Chef", and while cooking at home is still a "woman's affair", professional kitchens are still a male-dominated sector. Here more on "Why Are There No Great Women Chefs?"

Source: <http://www.gastronomica.org/why-are-there-no-great-women-chefs/>

Playing together?

As concerns housework (cleaning, shopping, cooking) positive signals come from the percentage of children represented playing together: in 16 (73%) out of the 22 catalogues where boys are represented, boys and girls are represented playing together. In all these images, boys and girls both play an active role and there is no situation where the boy or the girl is passively looking at the other playing.

A different picture emerges from the section of care and parenting related activities/toys. In this section, boys are present not only in few numbers but also in few catalogues: only in 8 out of 32. In 6 out of these 8, boys and girls are represented together and, in all cases except one, playing together.

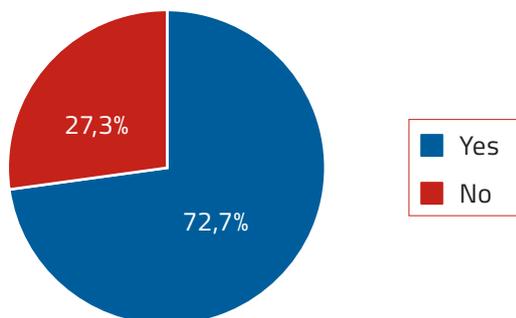
In the last case, the girl is playing and the boy is watching. This picture (right) is a good example showing that boys can also play with dolls and play the role of a caring parent. Such images, reproducing a growing reality especially among the young generations, can contribute to breaking the remaining barriers of stigma and stereotypes against women as the natural carers and men wanting to engage more in care and family responsibilities.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

In the area of housework, apart from the above mentioned professional vs. homemaker representation for kitchen sets and the equal representation as cashiers and customers, the main differences can be noted in the rest of activities that boys and girls do: girls are mainly cleaning, ironing and mopping, while boys are represented wall painting and preparing coffee.

A wide number of toys, both in the section of housework and in care activities, are pink and branded for girls. The background of these toys is very often pink or in pastel colours in all those pages for these toys, even in those catalogues where there is no division in sections "for boys" and "for girls". Kitchen sets were in some cases pink where a girl was playing with it, and grey and in bold colours when boys were pictured playing.

Playing together?

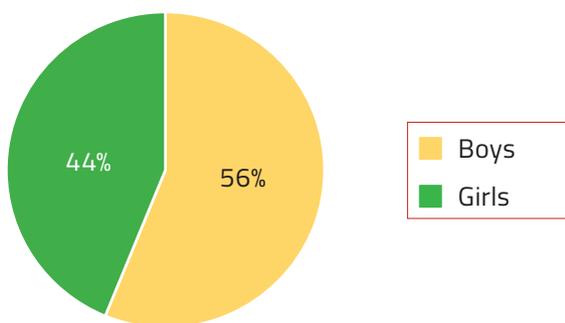


SCIENCE

How many boys and how many girls?

51 boys and 40 girls were counted playing with science-related toys. These include science and chemistry kits, telescopes and astronomy learning sets, physics and biology related toys. World globes are counted in this section since this is where they were presented in many catalogues.

Science



Numbers show quite a balanced picture that is supported also by the fact that in those catalogues where children are present (only 14 out of 32), both boys and girls are generally present playing with science-related toys. However, an analysis of the context and pages in which these toys are pictured, sometimes showed a striking difference between what is considered to be a girl science toy and a boy one (see below).

Playing together?

In 18 catalogues there were no children represented with toys, in the other 14 there were either boys, girls or both. In 7 out of the 9 catalogues where boys and girls are both represented, they are also playing together.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

Page background in this section can be very different if the toy is considered to be for a girl (pink and pastel colour background, lighter and more curved font..) and what is considered for boys (more blue, darker and bolder colours). In 7 catalogues there were toys that were clearly marked for girls and the same toy had two different versions: the "normal" one and the "pink" version for girls. In one catalogue, the only girl pictured in this section was playing

with the only "Perfume making kit", clearly branded for girls, while boys were playing with plain chemistry and astronomy kits. In another case, a girl was playing with a pink globe, where countries were all represented in shades of pink, while "normal" globes, with the most common versions of the political representation of maps were either with boys or without children.

WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND WOMEN INVENTORS?

"In OECD countries, fewer than 1 in 3 engineering graduates and fewer than 1 in 5 computer science graduates are girls. This is likely because of stereotypes and expectations, rather than performance differences in math and science. For example, at age 15 far fewer girls (4.7%) than boys (18%) - even among the top performers - reported that they expect to have a career in engineering or computing.

Even when girls do graduate from scientific fields of study, they are much less likely than boys to work as professionals in these fields, more often choosing to become teachers. [...] among graduates with science degrees, 71% of men but only 43% of women work as professionals in physics, mathematics and engineering. As a result, across OECD countries, only 13.7% of the inventors who filed patents are women."

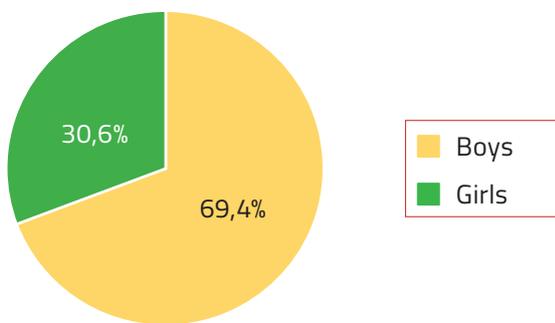
Source: OECD <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/wherearetomorrowsfemalescientists.htm>

CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING BLOCKS

How many boys and how many girls?

In this section there is a predominance of boys over girls represented (129 vs 57) in total and also in the number of catalogues in which boys and girls are represented: boys are present in 24 catalogues out of 32, girls in 18. Out of these, in 15 catalogues boys and girls are both present. In 3 catalogues only girls are present and the total amount of children represented is 3 (1 per catalogue).

Construction and building blocks



One of the girls who stands alone in the catalogue is playing with a meccano dressed up in a military looking uniform and portrayed in a very masculine way. In 9 catalogues where there are only boys, the total amount of children is 25. Therefore, around 1/3 of the catalogues offers images of boys only vs around 1/10 offering the image of girls only.

Playing together?

In 8 out of the 15 catalogues where both boys and girls are represented, they are also playing together. However, in 3 catalogues out of these 8, the girl is also or only a spectator, looking passively at the boy who is playing. In no case the boy was a passive spectator to the girl in the catalogues analysed.

#I LOOK LIKE AN ENGINEER

In the summer of 2015, a recruiting agency posted an engineer recruiting advertisement portraying a young woman. The ad went viral and a high number of comments suggested the woman in the ad was a model, not a "real" engineer. As a response, Isis Anchalee, the woman in the ad and an engineer, launched the social media campaign #ILookLikeAnEngineer and the hashtag was used by over 86.000 times in a week. A large number of women engineers posted their photo to provocatively ask.. what an engineer should look like if a woman does not look like one?

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

The concentration of boys and girls also differs according to the type of toy: if girls are more present when it comes to building blocks, they are almost absent in pages showing building tools and instruments. In over half of the catalogues (18 out of 32) there are different versions of toys, clearly marked for boys and for girls, through the offer of a pink version next to the standard one or with the use of decorations (glitters, skulls...). In those cases where a pink vs. normal version is offered, there is also a pink vs. blue version, identifying clearly boys and girls as different targets. Others offer thematic building sets, differentiating their products along a stereotypical gender line, for example offering a "princess building set" or a "warriors building set".

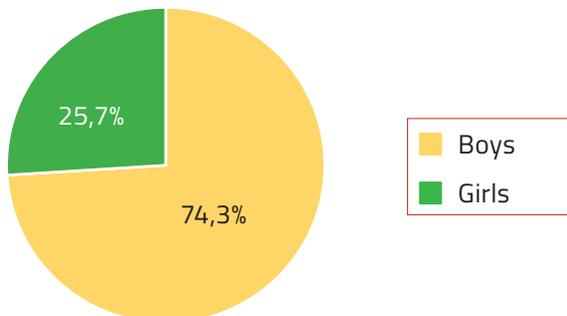
WOMEN GRADUATING IN ENGINEERING IN EUROPE

"Within the EU-28 (excluding Poland), close to three fifths (57.1 %) of all graduates in 2013 were women;[however,] male graduates accounted for close to three fifths of the total number of graduates for science, mathematics and computing fields, and close to three quarters of the total for engineering, manufacturing and construction-related fields"

Source: Eurostat, 2015

CARS & TRANSPORTATIONS AND SPORTS & OUTDOOR

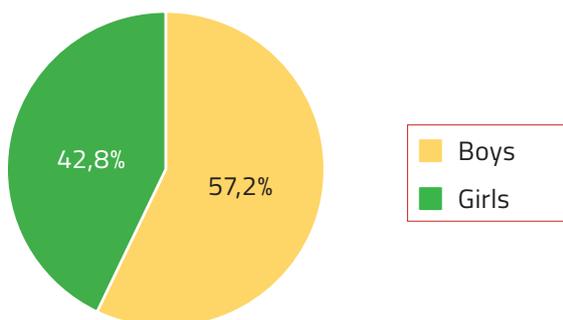
Cars and transportations



How many boys and how many girls?

The sector of cars and transportations of the catalogues analysed has a large number of images of children: 505, roughly one sixth of all images present. Out of the 505, boys amount to 74.3% (375) and girls 25.7% (130). Boys are present in 17 catalogues while girls only in 11. In all catalogues where girls are present, boys are also represented, while there are 6 catalogues where there are only boys. In no catalogue, among those analysed, is there a higher number of girls compared to the number of boys. In only 2 catalogues can be found the same number of girls and boys, respectively 2 girls and 2 boys in the first catalogue and 3 girls and 3 boys in the second.

Sports and outdoor



The sector of sports & outdoor has also a high number of children (491) but it seems more balanced in terms of the boy/girl ratio. However, as noted further below, a more balanced number does not necessarily mean a balanced picture. This sector pictures 281 boys and 210 girls in 22 catalogues. In 2 catalogues there are only boys represented only (4 boys in total) and in 1 catalogue, only 1 girl.

Playing together?

For cars and transportations, in 10 catalogues children are playing together, in 2 the girl is watching the boy playing. In no catalogue we find a boy watching a girl playing. In 3 catalogues, there are groups of at least 3 children playing together, 2 of them are composed of boys and girls, one of boys only.

For sports and outdoor, similarly to the previous section, in 12 catalogues children are playing together, in 2 the boy is playing and the girl is watching. In no catalogue is the boy watching the girl playing. In 8 catalogues there are groups of at least 3 children and in 5 cases they are composed of boys and girls and in 3 cases of either all boys or all girls.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

These two sections are similar in the way they are structured: first, girls and boys are both represented but playing with different types and style of toys and second, there is a differentiated branding for the same toys along gender lines.

For example, girls are more likely to be seen on pink bikes or scooters, or with jumping lines and roller skates, boys are more likely to be represented with excavating and construction machines, toy cars, camping tents, cars.. Moreover, not only are boys and girls playing with different toys, but when they are playing with the same type of toy (e.g. bike, scooter..) these are characterised by a different branding. Difference in branding is along the pink/blue line or, more often, in creating a special pink version of any toy (e.g pink bike, pink scooter, pink helmet, ..).

This image (above) of a boy playing with toy cars and with a girls taped to the wall was found at the very beginning of a catalogue, as a chapter cover introducing toy cars.



The image suggests and makes it acceptable, that a way for boys (men) to do what they want and enjoy is to constrain girls (women), even physically. The boy is represented smiling, showing satisfaction for the game and possibly because he is able to play at ease, with no disturbance from the girl. Moreover, being out of focus, the image tells us not to look at the girl (victim) but instead, stay with the perpetrator and look at his happiness. Her face shows no expression as her thoughts and feelings are

of no significance – she is just a doll. This can easily convey the message that violence, physical abuse or bullying is acceptable.

Moreover, it can suggest that is preferable for boys to limit the freedom of a girl instead of playing with her, showing that in the choice between play together or play alone, the boy has the possibility to impose his will on the girl and she has to accept it.

This image is highly disturbing and it is shocking that such a clear act of bullying and violence can be published in a toy catalogue, which is possibly handled by children as well. While this kind of image is not representative of the sample of pictures analysed, we find it important to highlight that the messages conveyed through this image are extremely dangerous and the consequences of explicitly and publicly making violence and bullying accepted can put at risk a high number of children.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS

One in three girls between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide experience bullying on a regular basis. [...] Among the high-income countries with available data, proportions of reported bullying among girls ranges from 8 per cent in Italy to 52 per cent in Lithuania.

Source: UNICEF

GENDER BASED BULLYING: A DEFINITION

“Gender-based bullying is a complex form of violence that targets a person’s sex or sexuality, representing a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event. The most common forms of bullying are verbal. If left unchecked, verbal bullying can lead to extreme violence.

In school and educational settings, teachers and other children commonly put pressure on children to make them conform to cultural values and social attitudes that define what it means to be ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’.”

Source of definition: UNICEF

VIDEOGAMES, CONNECTED TOYS AND DRONES

How many boys and how many girls?

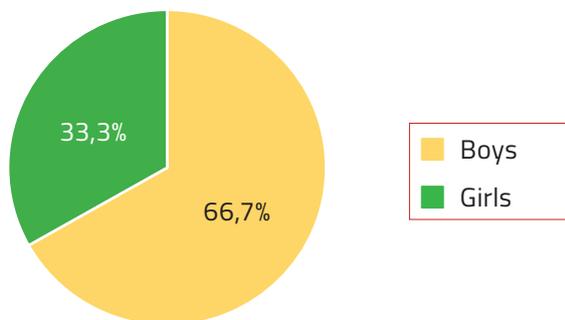
The number of children in these sections is quite low but there is a clear prevalence of boys, marking the “tech” toys categories as male. In sections about videogames, 16 boys and 8 girls were present, while for connected toys and drones, there are 66 boys and 25 girls. The average age in these sections, especially with some drones or expensive consoles, is higher than in other sections.

Children were grouped in 10 catalogues (less than one third) for videogames and in half of these (5 out of 10) the section only represented boys. For connected toys and drones, children were present in 19 catalogues out of 32 but only in 9 were there both boys and girls. In 9 catalogues, only boys were portrayed and in 1, only one girl.

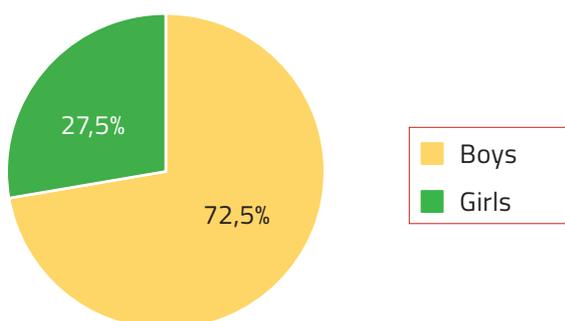
Playing together?

Only in 3 catalogues are children presented playing together with videogames. In two of these, both children are playing, in one case, the boy is playing and the girl is looking at him, without being involved. For the section on connected toys and drones, 6 catalogues picture children playing together and only in one case is there one active player (boy) and someone being the spectator (girl). In 5 cases they play together. In 1 case only per section are there groups of at least 3 children.

Videogames



Connected toys and drones



#GAMERGATE: WHICH PLACE FOR WOMEN IN VIDEOGAMES?

Women characters in videogames are, in many cases, either fragile victims to be rescued or sexual objects to be used and even, in some cases, sexually abused, exploited and raped.

#GamerGate: with increasing reactions and disapproval of this representation of women by a number of game developers and bloggers, and following the degradation of a personal altercation between a journalist and Zoe Quinn, a female developer, a number of anonymous gamers started an organised harassment campaign on the internet against Quinn and other women under the hashtag #GamerGate. Anonymous gamers, in a coordinated way, repeatedly threatened Quinn and other women of rape and death, as a form of extreme conservatism of their virtual world where women have no place but to provide pleasure and be dependent to a man's will.

Considering the increasing virtual reality games, it is nearly inevitable that eventually, content which simulates rape or murder will be made available on it as well.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

In both categories it can be noted that often toys are divided along the line “normal product vs pink product” to define the target group. In a limited number of catalogues, videogames were portrayed as being “for boys” or “for girls”. The colour behind the toy often accompanies the preferred target, with the use of darker and bolder colours, harder fonts for toys for boys and pink and pastel colours, softer and more curved fonts for toys for girls. In one catalogue a boy is represented playing with a drone together with an adult man. In the photo there is also a woman, not far from the adult man. However, while the man has an active role and is playing with the child, the woman is pictured looking and clapping at the successes of the boy and man, but playing no active role.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE EU?

1 in 3 women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15;

1 in 10 women has experienced sexual harassment or stalking through new technologies;

50 women die every week from male domestic violence.

Gender-based violence happens everywhere, in every society and EU country, regardless of social background, whether at home, at work, at school, in the street or online.

Source: FRA – Fundamental Rights Agency

COFACE supports the call to the European Union to ratify the Istanbul Convention and is part of the European Coalition to end violence against women and girls.

VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES AND VIOLENCE: A FERTILE ENVIRONMENT FOR HIGHER ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

A number of videogames include violent and sexist actions among the ones to be played along the game. However, with these actions becoming recurrent and sometimes part of the game itself, it is fair to ask ourselves whether playing with videogames and becoming acquainted with such actions can impact the gamers' perspective on what violence and sexism is. Moreover, whether these actions and their consequences (e.g. a woman with bruises after being beaten) can become less shocking and therefore more “accepted” because we get use to see them in the videogames (or virtual reality).

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate possible changes in rape acceptance and in the level of empathy with the victim by videogame players. An experimental study run in 2012 on a sample of videogame players indicated with robust results that sexual objectification of women and violence against women in video games does increase rape myths in the male participants. The results are limited in terms of expanding them to the general population but consistent with research indicating that sexual violence in media reduces sympathy toward rape victims in men. (Beck, 2012) Another study in 2016 investigated how exposure to sexist video games can decrease empathy for female violence victims. Playing violent-sexist video games increased, in the sample studied, masculine beliefs for male participants who could highly identify with the game character and decreased empathic feelings for female violence victims (Gabbadini, 2016).

WAR & GUNS VS. BEAUTY & GROOMING

How many boys and how many girls?

As the charts show, these two sections are providing quite an explicit picture of who is expected, and therefore represented, to be playing with guns vs beauty & grooming. 88% (150) of children in the sections war and guns are boys, only 12% (20) are girls. On the opposite side, only 5,5% (4) boys are present in the beauty and grooming section, versus 94,5% (69) girls.

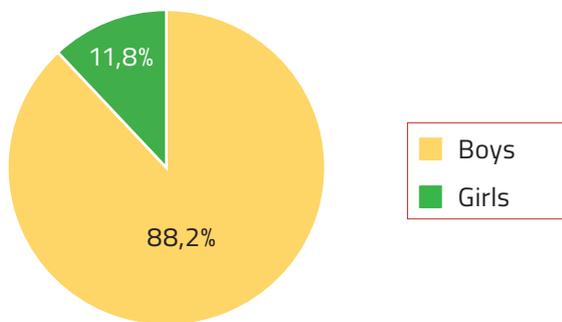
Playing together?

In no cases are boys and girls represented playing together in the section of war and guns. In one case a group of at least 3 children is represented but it is composed of boys only. In one case a boy and a girl are playing together in the section beauty and grooming but there are no groups of at least 3 children.

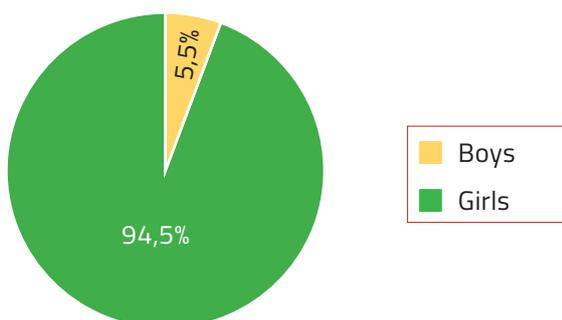
Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

Toys and page colours in these sections are very clearly set to refer to a specific audience and reflect stereotypical traits associated with male and female behaviours: aggressive and protective for young men (wars and guns), and fragile with the need to look pretty for young women (beauty and grooming). Colours for the sections on guns were dark and bold, the sections on beauty were pink-dominated. One line of "guns for girls" present on a few catalogues offers pink or pink decorated guns and many of these products are branded with the tag "rebel", assuming that a girl who wants to play with such toys must be a rebel, someone non-conforming to the rules of being a "standard" girl.

War and guns

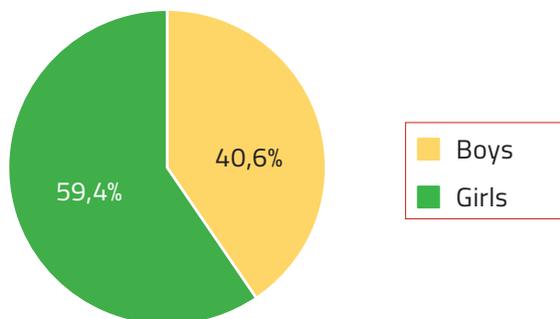


Beauty and grooming



ARTS&CRAFTS AND MUSIC

Arts & Crafts and music



How many boys and how many girls?

In the sample of catalogues, we found in the arts&crafts sections 182 boys (40%) and 266 (60%) girls showing a good mix and more or less balanced representation. However, this is a very wide section, including a very large number of different toys, from playing with dough to musical instruments, to colouring and crafts making. Therefore, if the general numbers are quite balanced, we can still see a trend of having a higher number of girls in some areas like crafts and beads, colouring and a higher number of boys for music. Interestingly, when looking at music, a higher number of boys are represented playing instruments like drums and guitars and girls are more represented as singer, singing alone or accompanying a boy playing an instrument.

Playing together?

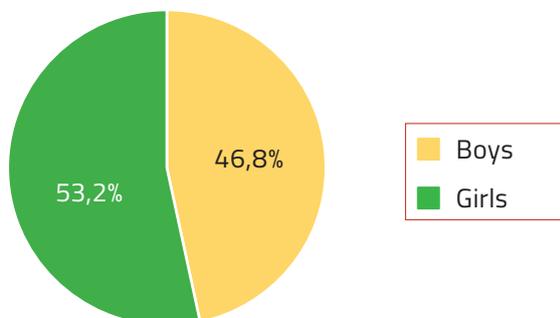
In 15 out of 32 catalogues, children are represented together and in all cases both children are actively playing. In 4 cases the same catalogue showed images of children playing together but also images where the one was playing and the other was audience. In these 4 catalogues there were both images of boys and girls being the one playing and the one being the audience. In other 2 catalogues, there were only images of either both playing or the boy playing and the girl being the audience.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

Differences of toys for boys and for girls are present in 17 catalogues and the main features of these differences are in line with other sections: colours on the background and the availability of a pink version of some toys. It is interesting to note how the change of colour for toys does not follow the assumption: blue=boy and girl=pink but more the existence of a "normal" toy and its pink homologue for girl. In music, for example, there are normal brown or black guitars or microphones, and pink ones for girls. As mentioned above, boys are more likely to be playing instruments, girls singing. It would be interesting to investigate whether these musical instruments (normal vs. pink) are different only in colour or also have different technical features. This is, however, not possible to understand from catalogues. This information could be useful to assess whether boys and girls are targeted only by a different external appearance of the toy or with two different types of toys, with a pattern of more or less technical features for the one for boys or girls.

ROLE-PLAY AND DRESS-UP COSTUMES

Role-play and dress-up costumes



costumes at all. In catalogues that were divided into “toys for boys” and “toys for girls” there was a pre-selection of what was appropriate to advertise as a costume for a boy or a girl. In these cases, boys sections were filled with superheros, characters from TV shows and cartoons, but also professions that ranged from doctor to firefighter, policeman, mechanics.. Girls sections had a number of characters from TV shows and cartoons, a few professions and a very high prevalence of princesses. As for those catalogues that were not divided into sections, it was possible to notice a similar trend, with boys and girls dressed-up in different pages or when appearing on the same page, the boy was wearing one of the “boys section” costumes and the girl was most likely a princess. A few exceptions are present, where boys and girls play together as mechanics (see next page) or where girls play dressed as a doctor.

How many boys and how many girls?

Costumes are an important part of toy catalogues and 190 boys and 216 girls were counted dressed-up across the 32 catalogues. The numbers look quite balanced at first sight but once looking at how boys and girls are portrayed, the result is less balanced.

Playing together?

In 4 catalogues, we see boys and girls represented playing together, for example playing the doctor-patient or the cashier with customer (while we present the example of grocery shopping also in this section, the children were counted only in the housework related section). In the case of the doctor –patient, the girl was impersonating the doctor and the boy the patient. For the cashier-customer impersonation, as mentioned in the section on housecare, across the catalogues boys and girls impersonate one and the other character. In 9 catalogues there are groups of at least 3 children. However, only in 1 out of these 9, the group is made of boys and girls, the other 8 are either all boys or all girls.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

Addressing this point for this section meant not only counting how many of the same toys were presented in two different versions, for boys or for girls, but also and primarily if boys and girls were offered the same type of

WHEN PINK BECAME A COLOUR FOR GIRLS

Pink has not always been a graceful and girly colour, on the contrary, it has for long been seen as a shade of red, the colour of war. It goes without saying that war was a man-zone, and so it was for red and pink. On the other hand, blue was considered a delicate colour, the one that the Virgin Mary is wearing in all official religious images. It is only after the WWII that pink became more often associated with girls and girly outfits and clothes. However, with the growth of feminists movements in the 1960s and '70s, the association of a certain colour to men or women decreased in favour of more unisex clothing and style. The '80s, with the booming of marketing, saw a new change and the creation of two separate markets for boys and girls, in clothing, toys, merchandising that we still very often see nowadays.

More info and details?

Read "Pink Wasn't Always Girly. A short history of a complex color"

Dress-up and racial stereotypes

In 3 catalogues there were costumes that could be considered a stereotypical representation of peoples and tribes. These represented, for example, native Americans or Chinese in a way that is not realistic, based on stereotypes and a Europe-centred vision of the world, where the representation of other peoples and their history (Chinese dynasties, native Americans..) is considered as dress-up costumes. No dress-up costumes were found to be representing European populations in their history (e.g. Romans, ancient Greeks, renaissance, French revolution dressings..). This can lead to a dichotomy for children who, in school and in their daily life, play and know children with diverse backgrounds but in catalogues see some of these backgrounds portrayed not as history or culture but as dress-ups.

Role-models, superheros and expected occupations?

Dress-ups are often connected with real life professions that children could impersonate and, ultimately, imagine as a possibility for their future. We cannot (and will not) assume there is a direct link of what children impersonate as a game and what they will do as a profession later in life. However, exposure to the widest range of possibilities and breaking down the stereotype of what a girl or a boy can become, is helpful to ensure that each child develops his/hers own passions and skills.

This is happening in some of the catalogues, like the one that contained the image above, a good example, where a boy and a girl play together as mechanics, a job “traditionally” for men only. However, in catalogues divided into sections for boys/girls, a pre-selection has been made for them by adults and children would most likely look at the section that they feel it corresponds to them. Therefore they would only enjoy a limited offer of costumes, with the clear message of what boys/girls are “supposed to become”. In particular, girls are presented with some professions but overwhelmingly offered to dress up like princesses. There is nothing wrong with a princess dress, but where are the prince costumes for boys? Why do girls have to be living in fairy tales, and boys in the real world of policemen, firefighters and mechanics?

This can easily lead to the idea that there are two possible ways for girls to grow up: either housewives (taking care of housework) and mothers (nurturing babies so that the father can have a career), supporting the professional man

(and breadwinner), or as a princess but is still dependent on a prince, for whom she is going to make herself look pretty – thus the beauty and grooming products.

The labour market in Europe is still very divided, with a lower participation of women into paid employment compared to men and with the presence of the so-called “segregation” of women into some professional sectors such as care, teaching (in schools, not in universities), nursing... How can we make sure that the images that we offer children in their early years are not impacting negatively on their life and professional trajectories by proposing them a limited set of tools (i.e. toys and costumes for boys/girls only) to use for their development? Should we not instead offer them the widest range possible and let them choose what to play with and who to become? Should we not show them support by proposing images that show they can play with any toy and impersonate any profession?

Finally, we have to avoid making a mistake: to think that we know better what children want to play with. If all they know is a gender biased selection of toys and costumes, they will want to play with those, however, if all children are represented playing with all types of toys and impersonating all professions, it will be up to each child to decide.



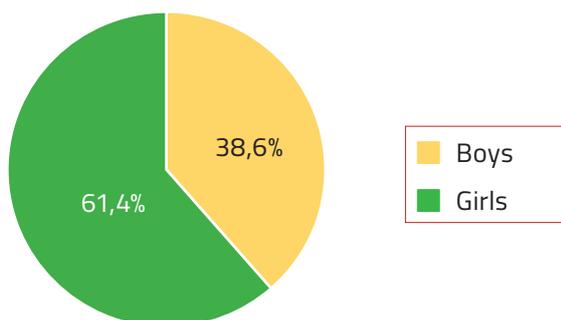
ANIMALS: DINOSAURS VS. STUFFED ANIMALS

How many boys and how many girls?

A total of 76 boys and 121 girls were represented playing with dinosaurs and stuffed animals. Despite a moderately balanced number of boys and girls (61% vs 39%) it must be noted that boys were mainly playing with dinosaurs and girls with stuffed animals. This division among boy and girl pictures is to be found once again: boys with toys expressing adventure, aggressive and external actions, while girls are with toys expressing fragility, care and nurturing and indoor actions. It is fair to say these are quite stereotyped divisions of roles between men and women, where men are providers and women carers.

and bold colours for dinosaurs. This recalls the background differences that were analysed in other sections, where pastel colours were associated with toys for girls and darker and bold colours with toys for boys. Finally, stuffed animals or dinosaurs were often inserted into pages with other toys: dinosaurs were next to toys for boys like guns or cars, stuffed animals next to dolls and pink toys. Their placement reinforces the idea mentioned above of the association of dinosaurs with the stereotypical role of provider for men, and stuffed animals with the care and nurturing role for women.

Animals



Playing together?

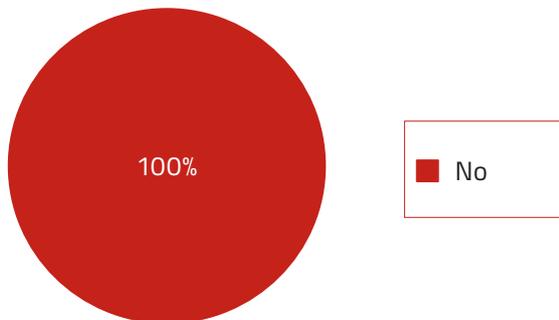
A limited number of catalogues (5) have children playing together. In 4 cases they are both active players while in 1 the girl is the active player and the boy is watching. Only 1 catalogue has groups of at least 3 children and it is composed by 3 boys.

Toys and context: different versions for boys and girls?

As mentioned above, the main distinction of this section is the unbalance of boys and girls in the two sub-sections: more boys (and few girls) in the pages with dinosaurs and, inversely, more girls than boys in the pages with stuffed animals. In these pages there are not the differentiation of toys as seen in other sections (normal vs. pink version of the same toy, pink vs. blue version..) but it is still possible to notice that dinosaurs and stuffed animals are placed on different pages and these pages have different styles: pastel colour backgrounds for stuffed animals and darker

DISABILITIES: VISUAL AND PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

Are children with disabilities represented?



Through 32 catalogues and among 3125 images of children, not a single child represented had visual and / or physical impairment.

In Europe 80 million people live with a disability, they are parents, children, grandparents, siblings and other family members. Children with disabilities play, dream and go to school every day. Like any other children, they play with toys and have fun. However, it seems that the toy world do not see them and do not represent them across their catalogues. They are invisible.

For this analysis we prepared a number of questions to assess the presence and representation of children with disabilities across the different sections of catalogues. However, we were not able to use any of them as there were no images to be analysed.

Are there toys representing disabilities?

An extremely reduced number of catalogues had toys representing a person with disability. In all cases they were reproduction of characters from series/animated videos or included in construction blocks sets. Due to the very limited number it was not possible to assess the environment in which these characters were placed or the intersectionality with gender and race.

#TOY LIKE ME

In 2015 a British journalist launched the campaign Toy Like Me, calling the global toy industry to positively represent children with disabilities. The campaign has gathered a large support and interest and keeps growing. Next to advocacy work, ToyLikeMe also makeover and adapt existing toys to represent all children.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that persons with disabilities have the right to education and to be included in the general education system on an equal basis with others. The Convention requires that all children with disabilities must be provided with the necessary support and there must be an inclusive education system at all levels as well as lifelong learning. The EU and 27 Member States have ratified the Convention and it is a legal obligation to implement what is required under the Convention.

Inclusion is not the same as integration. Whereas integration requires the child to adjust to an education system, inclusion must be about making the system adapt to the needs of each children. Inclusive education contributes to the development of the personality, talents and creativity of children with disabilities to their fullest potential. It is a prerequisite for them to lead a dignified and successful life as future citizens.

Inclusive education is also important to the quality of life of the family as a whole. It enables parents to take a different perspective on their child: it gives them the opportunity to raise and educate a child in light of the human rights model towards disability and advocate for their equal participation in society, just like any other children.

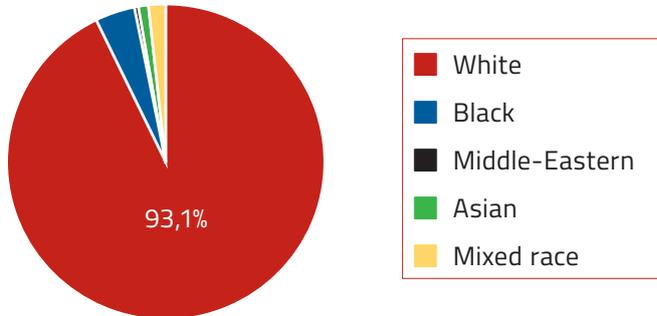
Inclusive education should enable parents to work in partnership with the educational system and professionals and to participate in the creation of inclusive learning atmosphere that positively contribute to the well-being of the child and the extended family.

Inclusive education challenges all education systems, calls them into question. It enables development towards more flexible teaching curricula, person-centred approach towards learning that can work for all pupils in the school system. It stimulates teachers, who improve their teaching methods, and energizes the school staff as a whole.

Finally, inclusive education supports a paradigm shift towards developing social inclusion that fosters autonomy and self-determination and implements the principle of non-discrimination of persons with disabilities.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Racial and ethnic diversity



Is racial and ethnic diversity represented?

Racial diversity was represented in 20 catalogues out of 32. However, the total number of children that were identified as non-white, across the 20 catalogues, is 217 out of 3125 (6.9%). Therefore, even if racial diversity is present, it is difficult to consider it significant. In particular, if we look closer at the data, out of the 217 non-white children, almost two thirds (129) were found in 2 catalogues only. This means that across the other 18 catalogues there are only 88 non-white children out of 3125.

Furthermore, when racial diversity is represented, it is mainly through the inclusion of black children (120 out of 217), followed by children of mixed race (59), 31 Asian, 7 middle-Eastern.

In the initial planning, there were questions that would have allowed to map if diversity was represented across the toy spectrum, in all sections of catalogues or either if there was a concentration in one or few sections. However, due to the small number of images and to the fact that a number of catalogues had an extremely low number of non-white children, it was not possible to conduct a general assessment. Nevertheless, in those few catalogues where numbers were higher, it was concluded that there was an even distribution across the catalogue and no particular concentration in one or more sectors could be noticed. One feature, however, that was noticed across a number of catalogues is that some of the photos that included black children were digitally modified and resulted lighter and clearer than other photos. The images were in lighter and clearer tones, making the child look paler and the toys less bright.

Racial stereotypes were extremely limited but, like in the picture aside, present nonetheless. Image below portrays a small black child with three big stuffed animals. What is

concerning is the characterisation and the choice of placing him only next to three wild savannah and jungle animals (an elephant, a monkey and a giraffe). This is particularly worrisome because the catalogue that contained this image, had only 2 non-white children (out of 55) and the only black child was placed in this image, potentially leading to a negative and racist correlation that the place of black children is among savannah and jungle animals.

Are there toys representing racial and ethnic diversity?

The majority of catalogues had toys representing racial diversity. However, they are a very limited number of toys that are shown across all catalogues and they are mostly reproducing characters from movies and TV animated shows.



CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

- The findings presented in this report are the result of the analysis of 32 toys catalogues from 9 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In each country, we gathered and analysed catalogues of three different categories: supermarkets, national toy shops and international toy shops. Findings in this report are the results of the analysis of 11 supermarkets, 13 national toy shops and 8 from international toy shops.
- We analysed images of 3125 children across 32 catalogues. Out of 3125, 2908 were white children, 120 black, 59 of mixed race, 31 Asian, 7 middle-eastern. There was no child with disabilities.
- In 18 catalogues out of 32 there were images of adults together with children. A large number of the images of adults were on chapter covers and only some of them were playing with the child and toy. However, in 13 out of these 18, adults were associated with a specific section and role, recalling a predefined and stereotyped image of men and women. A large presence of women are in the section for babies, while men are mainly represented in sections of sport and outdoor or cars and transportations.
- Out of 32 catalogues analysed, more than a third, 12 (37.5%), had specific sections of toys "for boys" and "for girls" versus 20 catalogues (62.5%) having no specific sections. This difference follows national lines more than typology of retailer and catalogues with a clear division in section for boys/girls all belonging to a limited number of countries, mainly in southern Europe.
- A number of the catalogues that are not formally divided into genders have, however, sections that are clearly marked by colours (pink and pastel colours for girls, darker and bolder colours for boys) or associations of toys from different categories in the same page, or in pages with a specific background colour (e.g. stuffed animals and dolls or beauty sets on pink pages, dinosaurs and cars or guns in darker pages). Finally, very often there is the existence of two versions of the same toy, a "normal" version and a pink one for girls (explicitly branded as such).
- It would be interesting to further investigate whether some of these "normal vs pink" toy lines, like musical instruments are different only in colour or also have different technical features. This is not possible to understand from catalogues but this information could be useful to assess whether boys and girls are targeted only by a different external appearance of the toy or with two different types of toys, with a pattern of more or less technical features for the one for boys or girls.
- In 5 sections, boys were at least two thirds of the total children, respectively: videogames (67%), construction (69%), drones (72%), cars and transportations (74%), war and guns (88%). Girls were over the two thirds of total children only in two sections: care activities (87%) and beauty and grooming (94,5%).
- In the remaining six sections (housework, science, sports, arts&crafts and music, role-play and dress-up costumes, animals) there is a more balanced representation. However, when analysis each category, boys and girls are often represented with different toys (e.g. in the section "animals" girls would be playing with stuffed animals, boys with dinosaurs).
- Concerning housework and house-related chores the representation is 60% of girls and 40% of boys, without a concrete difference among countries. However, while for some activities like groceries shopping it is possible to notice a general balance (we found images of both boys and girls playing as the customer and the seller), a bigger differentiation among boys and girls can be noted in children represented while playing with a kitchen set. It is, indeed, quite widespread among the catalogues that the boys cooking are dressed like professional chefs (hats, uniforms) or playing with a professional-looking kitchen set, while girls are dressed normally, like homemakers and play with everyday cooking sets. The risky message conveyed through these images, that could overturn the positive one showing more men involved in the housework, is that cooking and entering a kitchen for a men is a career and a professional opportunity, while for a woman is the normal routine, her assigned standard role.
- On the sections on role-play and costumes, in catalogues that were divided into "toys for boys" and "toys for girls": boys sections were filled

with superheros, characters from TV shows and cartoons, but also professions that ranged from doctor to firefighter, policeman, mechanics.. Girls sections had a number of characters from TV shows and cartoons, a few professions and a very high prevalence of princesses. As for those catalogues that were not divided into sections, boys and girls appeared dressed-up in different pages or when appearing on the same page, the boy was wearing one of the “boys section” costumes and the girl was most likely a princess. We cannot (and will not) assume there is a direct link of what children impersonate as a game and what they will do as a profession later in life. However, exposure to the widest range of possibilities and breaking down the stereotype of what a girl or a boy can become, is helpful to ensure that each child develops his/hers own passions and skills.

- One image represented a scene of bullying where a girl was taped to the wall to let the boy play. Even if it is only one image and no generalization should be made, the use of images suggesting that bullying

and abusive behaviours are acceptable must be avoided.

- Due to the absence of children with disabilities it has not been possible to analyse any intersection with racial and gender diversity
- Along the same line, the main finding regarding racial diversity is that the presence of non-white children is extremely limited and non corresponding to the current diversity children live in their daily life.

32

number of catalogues

3125

images of children
(1629 boys - 1496 girls)

9

countries

2908

white children

217

non-white children

0

children with disabilities

COFACE #TOYSANDDIVERSITY PRINCIPLES – FIRST ESSENTIAL STEPS TO BREAKING STEREOTYPES

These Six Principles aim to offer a critical view of the world of toy catalogues, using a diversity lens, with a view to raising awareness of what can be potential risks and concerns among parents and families, primary buyers of toys, but also among NGOs like family and consumers associations. Finally, we would like to raise awareness also in the industries directly and indirectly connected with the world of toys and children's products: from producers to retailers, from advertisers to marketing and graphic design agencies.

These principles are to be considered as core values, we encourage industry, NGOs, parents and families to take them up as guidelines to be adapted to their specificity.

1. Let children decide what they want to play with: No more division into boys and girls sections

A toy can be different things for a child and support his/her creativity, imagination, learning development and fun. Introducing categories "for boys" and "for girls" means limiting children's choices of which toys to play with by imposing on them predefined and stereotyped categories. The same is valid for indirect classification, such as using specific colours or shades to refer to boys or girls (e.g. pink and pastel colours for girls, darker and bolder colours for boys) or by representing next to a certain toy only boys or only girls. We suggest to eliminate sections for boys and girls, start using all colours for all toys and introduce pictures of boys and girls playing with all types of toys.

2. Do not channel children into stereotyped professions and life patterns: Let them play to be whomever they want to be

Imagination has a big role for children play. Do not limit their imagination of whom they can be (and impersonate) by offering to boys and girls different costumes and profession-related toys. Let's not reduce their ambitions by offering them only and constantly the same pre-defined roles. There is a need to open to both boys and girls the chances to see someone like them impersonating all professions. In the same way, because the number of fathers more actively and publicly taking care of their children is growing, it would be appropriate to show more boys playing parenting and care-related duties.

3. Join your voice to end gender-based violence and bullying: promote non-violent images and behaviours

One in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 in Europe. Bullying, including cyberbullying, is a growing phenomenon across the EU Member States, with about 1 in 5 children having experience of online bullying. Images displaying violence or behaviours that can be violent, harassing, demeaning should be categorically avoided. When children are represented together, it would be appropriate to avoid patterns that would put one child category (e.g. girls, children with disabilities, of a specific race) as a passive audience to the other child.

4. Represent families in their diversity

A growing number of children grow up in single parent families, bi-national or bi-racial families, same sex and rainbow families, transnational families or multigenerational families. Representation of adults is, however, limited to a very restricted sample and possibly stereotyped to white adults in their 30s-40s. We recommend including adults of different races, age groups (e.g. grandparents), adults with disabilities because all family forms and family members deserve respect and representation.

5. Children with disabilities play too: stop their invisibility and include them in the toy world

There are 80 million Europeans with disabilities: children, parents, grandparents and other family members. In our survey we did not find any child with disabilities. Children with disabilities play, go to school and use their imagination, just like any other children. But they are invisible. Inclusive education has been proven to be beneficial for all children, including children without disabilities. Let's put an end to their invisibility, promote diversity and include them in the toy world, both by including their images in visual communication and by producing toys representing them.

6. Children with a diverse racial background: let's move to a fair representation

The number of EU citizens and residents having different racial backgrounds is growing in Europe, together with the number of children having parents or family members coming from different countries or racial backgrounds. Their representation is very low in toy catalogues and sometimes can be linked to racial stereotypes or filters may be applied to the images to make black or dark skin look less dark. A fairer representation of the diversity of children present in our society in its complexity would be appropriate.

ANNEX: CATALOGUES ANALYSED

(by country, in alphabetical order)

BELGIUM

Colruyt
Fun.be
Maxitoys
Oliwood toys

BULGARIA

Comsed
Xinoland

CROATIA

Babycentre
Bubamara
Konzum
Interspar
Muller

DENMARK

Bilka
Club BR
Fotex
ToysRUs

GERMANY

Imaginarium
Lidl Toys
Spielemax
ToysRUs

ITALY

Carrefour
IPER
Maxitoys
Toyscenter

SPAIN

Carrefour
El Corte Inglés
Juguettos
Toyplanet
ToysRUs

SWEDEN

BR
Lekia

UNITED KINGDOM

Argos
Smyths Toys

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To raise awareness and analyse the situation of representation of children in the media, COFACE Families Europe chose to design a project that would analyse, as a starting point, toy catalogues across Europe.

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