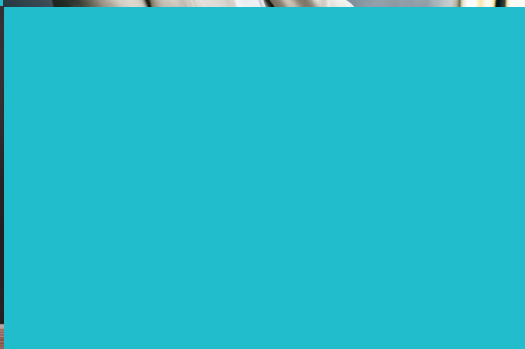




● ● V4+ Academy of Young
● ● Business Women Leaders

Women situation on the labour market in the Visegrad Region

Report



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• Visegrad Fund
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword – Anna Borzęcka, Human Resources Director at Baker & McKenzie.....	3
Foreword – Paulina Łukaszuk, Cluster Head of Internal Communication, the Adecco Group.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	6
About the Lesław A. Paga Foundation.....	7
About Our Partners.....	8
About the V4+ Academy.....	12
1. Women’s Participation in the Labour Force. A Long Way to Go.....	13
2. Are we really that different?.....	25
3. The perception of woman leaders over time - lessons learned.....	37
4. Women in leadership positions.....	44
5. Gender inclusion on the management board.....	54
6. Women as Startup Founders.....	62
7. Addressing professional burnout.....	67
8. Burnout (research on burnout in working women from Poland, Czechia and Hungary).....	74
9. Women in the financial sector.....	83
10. How data analytics can (and cannot) help to close the gender gap on labour markets.....	87
Alumni of the Foundation.....	91

FOREWORD

- Anna Borzęcka, Human Resources Director at Baker & McKenzie

The preparation of the report is the results of the female group project on the Women situation on the labour market in the Visegrad Region. It has been years since we noticed a number of significant changes in the social and legal environment, indicating that the topic of women role on the marketplace is noticed.

That report touches the most important issues related to Women challenges they faced for years, which should direct attention of all employers at implementing laws and policies promoting gender equality, investing in women in their organizations, being fair and inclusive to all people, regardless of their gender.

Historical and statistical data on the differences illustrate the situation of women and men on the labor market including the cultural and ideological factors, which influence on the role of women in the marketplace and show differences and similarities in the approach of women and men to leadership role, people management and problem solving.

That is an attempt to answer the question why it is so important to include women in strategic roles in any organization and how employers can benefit from gender diversity. The collective overview of the role of women in politics in the countries of the Visegrad group, their influence on shaping public opinion, making key decisions and challenges they have to face on the daily basis.

One of the chapters relates to an analysis of women's participation in creating new businesses, start-ups and innovative solutions. There is also an attempt to answer the question of what actions we can take up to encourage women to set up their own businesses and strengthen their entrepreneurial spirit.

An important part of the publication is the analysis of the situation of women on the labor market during the pandemic, Covid-19 and its impact of increasing burnout rates or job losses. That will be one of the biggest challenge for most of the international firms.

The final part of the report relates to data analytics in the recruitment process and its influence on the way of screening and selecting candidates. The algorithms more often supports male candidates, what affects the entire process. The authors try to strike a balance and give some examples of possible modifications.

I believe that researches continue to explore the effects of positive thinking about the parities, female leadership and teams' management which have significant values in terms of organization and purpose showing their influence that helps to achieve better results of all organizations.

I wish all readers a pleasant reading and I wish all women to be strong enough "to change the world" and enjoy taking on new challenges.

FOREWORD

- Paulina Łukaszuk, Cluster Head of Internal Communication, The Adecco Group

Women have power

For many years I have been observing the situation of women on the labour market and studies presenting the phenomenon of inequality, as well as initiatives stimulating discussion around this topic and the search for solutions. The year 2021 is special in this context. We are living in a new reality, there is an unprecedented publication before you, and the slogan #NotWaiting107Years appears more and more frequently in our surroundings.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, women in Central and Eastern Europe will have to wait 107 years for economic, social, and legal equality. What is more, the pace of change has been slowed down enough by the pandemic that the wait for equal treatment in employment (and beyond), may be longer. The same report a year earlier estimated the date of equal pay at the year 2222, so in 12 months it shifted the forecast by 55 years. Even experts today find it difficult to say when women around the world will start earning the same as men. Yet gender parity is of vital importance for economic development. Countries where women are marginalised or excluded from the labour market due to legal barriers, wage gaps, stereotypes, or inappropriate parental leave and childcare policies have lower productivity.

Women have shown many times in history that they can find their way in a difficult and changing reality. I hope this will continue to be the case now, at a time when more than 80% of female secondary school graduates cannot name a woman with scientific or engineering achievements. As never before, we need discussions and solutions.

What is needed, as pointed out by the authors of this publication, is cooperation between employers and governments of individual countries in order to increase women's professional activity and create transparent rules of equal pay. Making it easier to reconcile family and professional life is also an important element. This includes increasing the availability of childcare and care for the elderly, reducing disparities in maternity and paternity leave, and introducing hourly flexibility into employment law. It is also digital solutions, modern technologies, and remote working. And finally, diversity and inclusion, which are not slogans but the DNA of organisations. At the same time, let us not forget about ourselves. For it is women, with the support of those around them, who must work together for success – to negotiate, to develop, and to reach higher.

Many thanks to all the authors involved in the preparation of this publication. I hope that their conclusions and suggestions will provide an opportunity to question gender differences, model effective behaviour,

and change practice to one where inclusivity is the new standard. The authors of the report not only analyse the situation, but also indicate what can be done to change the *status quo* and accelerate the pace of such transformation. They point out how important it is to counteract stereotypes instead of reproducing them and to call out all those who feed them. With their publication, they initiate a conversation about inequalities and being role models for the youngest generations. By forming a team to work on the publication, they have built an organisation that takes a stand against inequality, providing us with knowledge about the situation of women in the Visegrad Group. Even the smallest activities can make a big difference! Equal opportunities are not beyond our power. All it takes is for everyone to take a small step.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication is the result of work pursued by socially-committed women who are not indifferent to the situation of their female colleagues on the labour market in the Visegrad Region – who aim to develop it and who perceive untapped female potential as an underestimated resource on professional markets. The authors of the report – Businesswomen Leaders – constantly influence and support their future development.

We would like to recognise the contribution of all the individuals who supported the personal growth of the alumni project – trainers, specialists, experts, and supervisors, as well as alumni of previous editions of the project who prepared the participants to research and write the report. We would like to thank our project partners – Institut pro politiku a společnost, ICM Informační centrum pro mládež Jindřichův Hradec, Republikon Intézet, Novosadska Ženska Inicijativa – for their support and efforts to establish an international environment for individual growth. We wish to highlight the support provided by the International Visegrad Fund, which funds all the activities carried out within the project, including preparation and dissemination of the publication. We are looking forward to further initiatives to facilitate collaboration between the Visegrad countries that will support diversity and female professional empowerment in the region.

ABOUT THE LESLAW A. PAGA FOUNDATION



Since 2003, the Lesław A. Paga Foundation has enabled young leaders to expand their potential by actively contributing to the shape of the region's future. The foundation aims to create a network of highly ambitious students and young professionals, who not only seek to advance in their professional lives, but also want to make an impact in their immediate environment and on a social level.

Our educational projects cover the fields of:

- Equality and diversity (V4+ Academy of Young Business Women Leaders, Academy of Business Women Leaders and Civic Society)
- Capital markets and finance (Capital Market Leaders Academy, CEE Capital Market Leaders Forum),
- Energy (Academy of Energy; New Energy Forum),
- Healthcare (Healthcare Leaders),
- Technology and innovations (Young Innovators, Innovation Day)

The alumni of the foundation are given unique opportunities to learn from the best experts and gain practical experience in over 90 partner companies. There are about 5,000 alumni, who support each other not only professionally, but privately. It is also our mission to promote the highest ethical standards and culture among entrepreneurs.

Our vision of promoting the highest ethical standards is not limited to professionals and students. We give secondary school students the opportunity to participate in the Stock Market Game (SIGG), and those who finish their secondary education can apply for the Indeks Start2Star Scholarship, awarded for the duration of university studies. Apart from our regular projects, we organise conferences, workshops, and lectures, whose speakers are the best specialists from Polish and European markets.

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS



ICM Jindřichův Hradec NGO

Main activities of ICM Jindřichův Hradec NGO is a regular year-round activity in the field of working with organized and unorganized children and young people, formal and occasional education of youth and adult citizens of the Czech Republic and the EU, information and counselling service for minors and free-time activities for children and youth.



Institute for Politics and Society

Institute for Politics and Society is the most active political think-tank in Czech Republic. The mission of the Institute is to cultivate the Czech political and public sphere through professional and open discussion. Institute aims to create a living platform that defines problems, analyzes them, and offers recipes for their solution in the form of cooperation with experts, politicians, international conferences, seminars, public discussions, and political and social analysis available to the whole of Czech society. They believe that open discussion with experts and the recognition of the causes of problems is a necessary presumption for any successful solution to the political and social problems facing society today.



Republikon

Republikon is a liberal think tank organization based in Budapest. Independent from any political party but committed to democratic values, tolerance, and the construction of a more open society. It is the mission of Republikon to articulate new ideas, to find ways of making the values of liberal democracy, human rights and tolerance more popular and to contribute to any future coalition between parties, civil organisations and NGOs critical of the authoritarian tendencies visible in Hungary. Our experts are professionals in political science, economy, sociology, international relations, education and communication and are dedicated to work for the aims of the Institute – some of them doing it also as active members of civil organisations. The organisation is involved in policy researches and it is focusing on initiating projects that contribute to a more open, democratic and free society. It started a regular public opinion survey program in 2015. The Institute also conduct focus groups on a regular basis. Republikon also organizes regular events Europe-wide, where Hungarian and international experts share their results and opinions on current topics. The organization is member of several European organizations active in public policy issues. Republikon has taken part in several EU-level projects in diverse fields so it has conducted a number of programs relevant for this project: researches on situation of minorities, integration of underprivileged groups, and organizing conferences, workshops about migration crisis, populism, radicalism and protection of human rights.



The Women's Initiative of Novi Sad

The Women's Initiative of Novi Sad was established for the first time in May 2010 as an informal group made up of students who were socially active at the time and worked through various youth, civic and student organizations, as well as through student and youth representative bodies. The main objectives of the organization are:

- Active work in the field of raising the level of civic awareness
- Encouraging women to actively participate in society
- Developing women's cooperation and providing conditions for participation in decision-making through a sustainable institutional framework, based on the needs of women and in partnership with women
- Providing healthy living and social conditions for the upbringing and upbringing of children
- Developing a system of informing women at all levels and in all areas
- Ensuring the exercise of the right to equal opportunities for all women in society, in particular women living in harsh conditions and particularly vulnerable women
- Improving the living conditions of vulnerable social groups
- Improving opportunities for quality leisure time for women Preservation of traditional values, old crafts, homemade craftsmanship and hand crafts
- Developing, promoting, encouraging and stimulating employment, self-employment and women's entrepreneurship
- Improving conditions for the safe life of women and children
- Preservation and promotion of the health of women and children, reduction of risks and leading health disorders and development of health care tailored to women and children
- Empowering women for initiatives and activities that are in line with the basic goals of sustainable development
- Advocacy for the protection of basic rights and freedoms in order to improve the standard of living
- Advocacy for the protection of nature and a healthy environment

ABOUT THE ACADEMY

● ● **V4+ Academy of Young Business Women Leaders**



The V4+ Academy of Young Business Women Leaders project gathered 25 young, ambitious women from the Czech Republic, Poland, the Republic of Serbia, Slovakia and Hungary to equip them with business and soft skills.

Over 9 months, experts, specialists in equalling opportunities on the labour market and women who play key roles in business shared their experiences with the project participants.

They helped them to practice negotiation skills, carry out business assessments and understand project management. They supported their work on emotional intelligence – communication, self-esteem, giving feedback and assertiveness. This process enabled young businesswomen leaders to take advantage of their true female strengths and foster positive stereotypes about feminine traits in the business community.

In this way, participants not only had a chance to strengthen their own skills, test their abilities to work within a team and as individuals, and create new professional networks. They also gained a deeper understanding of the labour market in the V4+ region and, along with trainers from the academy, they had the opportunity to write and publish conclusions and recommendations for employers on women's role in business development. The present publication is the effect of their work and growth.

Chapter 1

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR FORCE: A LONG WAY TO GO

Introduction

The current global trend appears to be shifting towards increased gender equality across many fields, but what does the persistent gender gap in labour force participation convey about how much work still lies ahead? Gender equality is the fifth goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reflecting the aim but not the practical steps necessary to “achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.”¹ This paper will outline the current major obstacles to women’s participation in the labour force and examine the driving factors for betterment of the situation with a specific focus on the Visegrad Four countries, which have ranked among the top eight European Union countries with the highest employment gender gap.²

Overview

The question may and in fact has been asked: why does the gender gap in employment even matter? Some claim that the difference exists simply because fewer women want to work; however, data shows that 70% of women want to participate in paid employment, yet face countless obstacles, from tax incentives for single-earner homes to exorbitant childcare prices.³ If the value of achieving gender equality in terms of freedom of choice to work is not compelling, there are the economic benefits of prioritising women’s participation in the labour force. The gender gap in employment in Europe alone is estimated to result in 10% GDP per capita losses.⁴ Globally, the rate of women’s participation in the labour force was 47% compared to 72% for men in 2019, and it is estimated that closing that gap by 2025, as per the Group of Twenty (G20) goal, would raise global GDP for that year by USD 5.8 trillion.⁵

1 United Nations, “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development,” accessed 21 November 2020, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

2 Anna Murawska, “Gender as a Factor Behind Unequal Labour Market Participation of Women and Men in European Union Countries,” *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization & Management / Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Slaskiej. Seria Organizacji i Zarzadzanie*, no. 139 (April 2019): 383, <https://doi.org/10.29119/1641-3466.2019.139.30>.

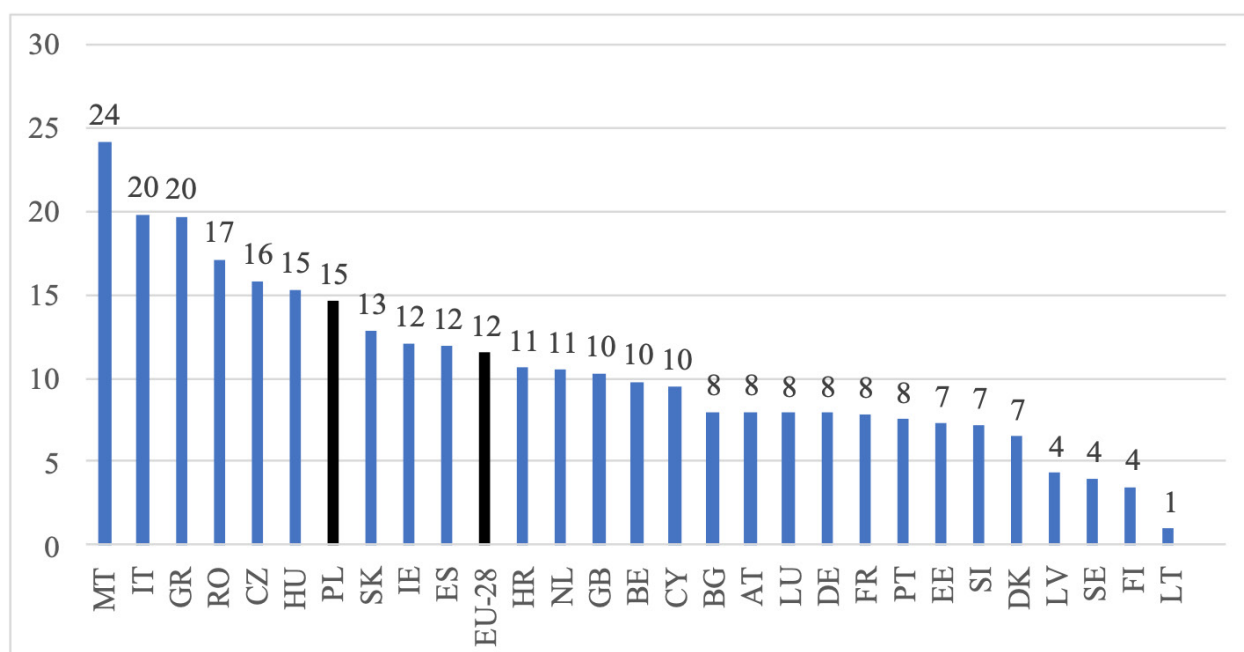
3 International Labour Organization, “World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends for Women 2017 - Executive Summary,” 2, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_557077.pdf.

4 M. Teignier-Baqué and D. Cuberes, “Aggregate Effects of Gender Gaps in the Labor Market: A Quantitative Estimate,” *Journal of Human Capital* 10, no. 3 (2016), https://kopernio.com/viewer?doi=10.1086%2F683847&token=WzI4ODk4NjEsIjEwLjEwODYvNjgzODQ3Il0.S4HKFwHMNNkK2-QUHRLou_nhaCA.

5 International Labour Organization, “World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends 2020 - Executive Summary,” 2020, 4, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_734479.pdf; International Labour Organization, “World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends for Women 2017 - Executive Summary,” 2.

While bridging the gender gap in employment would have enormous economic benefits in the countries which face the largest gaps and losses, one must be careful not to attribute this problem solely to developing countries. In Europe and North America, there is a 13.5 percentage point gap between women and men's participation in the labour force, with women's participation rate at 77.5% and men's at 92.1%.⁶ Focusing on Europe, Anna Murawska's 2019 calculation using Eurostat data found the Visegrad Four countries continue to struggle significantly with gender equality in labour force participation rates (Figure 1).⁷

Figure 1. Employment gap by % in European Union countries in 2017. Source: Anna Murawska's calculations based on Eurostat (2019). Database. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 15-30 April 2019.



The issue of gender inequality in the workforce is not solely limited to participation rates; women are also overrepresented in unpaid work, such as childcare and housework, part-time work, low-wage jobs, and the education, health, and social work sectors.⁸ While some part-time work can be beneficial, “very short hours or mini-jobs” can leave women in perpetual poverty with little means to escape.⁹ The prevalence of women in these types of part-time jobs leaves them particularly vulnerable to economic disturbances such as the COVID-19 crisis.

⁶ “Women,” ILOSTAT, accessed 31 October 2020, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/>.

⁷ Murawska, “Gender as a Factor Behind Unequal Labour Market Participation of Women and Men in European Union Countries,” 383.

⁸ International Labour Organization, “World Employment and Social Outlook - Trends for Women 2017 - Executive Summary,” 2; Nicole Bateman and Martha Ross, “Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?,” Brookings, 14 October 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>.

⁹ Francesca Bettio and Alina Verashchagina, *Fiscal System and Female Employment in Europe*, 2009, 10.

Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Crisis?

The answer to the question of whether women have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis is a tragic and decisive ‘yes’. Decades of progress towards increased equality in labour participation rates between men and women have been undone by the pandemic. With past economic recessions, men’s jobs were more affected; however, in this crisis, women’s job loss rates exceed those of men by 2.6 percentage points.¹⁰ Considering the pre-existing gender gap in labour force participation rates, the fact that women make up 54% of coronavirus-related job losses demonstrates an unfortunate unequal reality.¹¹

Unemployment aside, employed women are also facing different challenges than their male counterparts. For example, women make up “70% of health workers and first responders” in a sector with an abnormally large gender pay gap.¹² In addition, the McKinsey Global Institute found women’s employment to be significantly more vulnerable than men’s during the COVID-19 pandemic due, in part, to sectoral differences but more crucially, to the burden of unpaid care.¹³ Even before the pandemic, this burden fell more on women, but the COVID crisis has exacerbated this imbalance because of the increased demand for childcare, care for the elderly, housework, and cooking.¹⁴ It is critical for the global economy that efforts be taken to directly assist women impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. More women in employment translates into benefits for themselves, their families, future generations, and the world at large. If the impact of the pandemic on women’s employment is not mitigated, women’s economic and existential security will be driven dangerously off course; girls’ enrolment in formal education will decrease; women will be more at risk of being victims of domestic violence; and the severity of the gender poverty imbalance will intensify.¹⁵

Ideological Influences

Ideological influences on women choosing not to work, being prohibited from entering the workforce, or being discouraged from it should not be underestimated. Although these factors can play a large role in determining the reasons why, they should take a lesser role in a solutions-oriented approach, as ideological and cultural traditions can be the most difficult practices to change. Additionally, when progressive policies that encourage and aid women’s participation in the workforce are put in place on a national level, it signals a prevailing norm and can greatly influence gender equality within the population.¹⁶ Ideologically, beliefs about gender and the precipitating factors behind an increasingly positive attitude towards gender equality in a given coun-

10 Anu Madgavkar et al., “COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects,” McKinsey & Company, accessed 20 November 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>.

11 Madgavkar et al.

12 UN Women, “COVID-19 and Its Economic Toll on Women: The Story Behind the Numbers,” accessed 20 November 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>.

13 Madgavkar et al., “COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects.”

14 Madgavkar et al.

15 UN Women, “COVID-19 and Its Economic Toll on Women.”

16 Stéfanie André et al., “Support for Traditional Female Roles across 32 Countries: Female Labour Market Participation, Policy Models and Gender Differences,” *Comparative Sociology* 12, no. 4 (2013): 447–76, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-12341270>.

try correlate strongly with women's participation in the labour force. Many scholars have taken to examining which socio-cultural changes result in increased ideological support for gender equality, and their findings indicate two predominant factors: educational attainment and secularisation.¹⁷ One reason for the connection to secularisation is that the religiosity of a country is often linked to patriarchal family structures and reduced female participation in the workforce, e.g. in Egypt or Italy.¹⁸ Stefanie André et al. investigated the issue of traditional female role attitudes on a cross-national scale and found that "countries and their governments" act as "a socialising environment for people".¹⁹ They found that attitudes towards gender equality have a cyclical relationship with women's participation in the labour force, with both factors continually benefitting each other.²⁰ Due to the highly variable nature of different social policies on the average cross-national impact on decreasing traditional female role attitudes, André et al. excised any ambiguities from their recommendation to EU countries, which they based only on their conclusive findings about the positive effect of women's participation in the labour force and subsidised child care on increasing gender equality.²¹ This reinforces the notion that socio-cultural attitudes and policy have the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship.

Discrimination

Combatting discrimination against women in the workforce entails not only making anti-discrimination legislation but enforcing and supplementing it with other measures. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) study conducted by Christian Gonzales et al. found that "less legal discrimination against women is strongly associated with higher female labour force participation."²² Since 1960, legal discrimination against women has been gradually decreasing;²³ however, many discriminatory laws and practices remain in force. In Azerbaijan and Poland, for example, women are restricted in terms of the industries in which they may not be employed due to health and safety concerns.²⁴ Those two countries are not alone; all 141 economies evaluated by Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) included discriminatory labour regulations (Figure 2).²⁵

17 André et al.; Paula Thijs et al., "The Rise in Support for Gender Egalitarianism in the Netherlands, 1979-2006: The Roles of Educational Expansion, Secularization, and Female Labor Force Participation," *Sex Roles* 81, no. 9–10 (November 2019): 594–609, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-1015-z>.

18 Anne Winkler, "Women's Labor Force Participation," *IZA World of Labor*, 2016, 5, <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.289>.

19 André et al., "Support for Traditional Female Roles across 32 Countries," 471.

20 André et al., "Support for Traditional Female Roles across 32 Countries."

21 André et al., 473.

22 Christian Gonzales et al., "Fair Play: More Equal Laws Boost Female Labor Force Participation," IMF Staff Discussion Note, February 2015, 6, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2015/sdn1502.pdf>.

23 Gonzales et al., 13–15.

24 Yasmin Bin-Humam, Khrystyna Kushnir, and Rita Ramalho, "Mapping the Legal Gender Gap in Getting a Job" (Women, Business, and the Law, 2012), 2, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/403761519938651052/Topic-Note-Getting-a-Job-EN.pdf>.

25 Bin-Humam, Kushnir, and Ramalho, 2.

Figure 2:



While these practices may seem to be protecting women, in countries where they are widespread, women's labour participation rates suffer.²⁶

The Czech Republic provides a real-world demonstration of the gap between the existence of legislation and its enforcement. In the Czech Republic, there are *de jure* anti-discrimination laws but a *de facto* lack of legal enforcement of those laws.²⁷ The Czech Anti-Discrimination Act aligns with EU-wide anti-discrimination legislation, yet cases related to the act remain few and far between due to bureaucratic hurdles, cultural attitudes which are more likely to favour the employer, and negative media portrayal of women who do make use of the act.²⁸ The case of the Czech Republic shows the need for supplementary tools to battle discrimination as one of the barriers to women's participation in the labour force.

Child-Related Leave

Determining the optimal child-related leave policies to benefit women's participation in the labour force is a matter of finding a balance between the length of the leave and the provision of childcare services. Different policies in Estonia and Slovenia during their transitions from centrally-planned economies to market-led economies provide an example of the need for this balance. Initially, both countries' maternity leave and childcare policies were the same, but reconfigurations of their systems saw Estonia extending pregnancy and maternity leave and reducing childcare establishments by 14% while also increasing their cost.²⁹ In Slovenia, alternatively, maternity leave policies remained the same along with the price of childcare, while "the number of

26 Bin-Humam, Kushnir, and Ramalho, 8.

27 Kristina Koldinská, "The Policy on Gender Equality in the Czech Republic," 2015, 35.

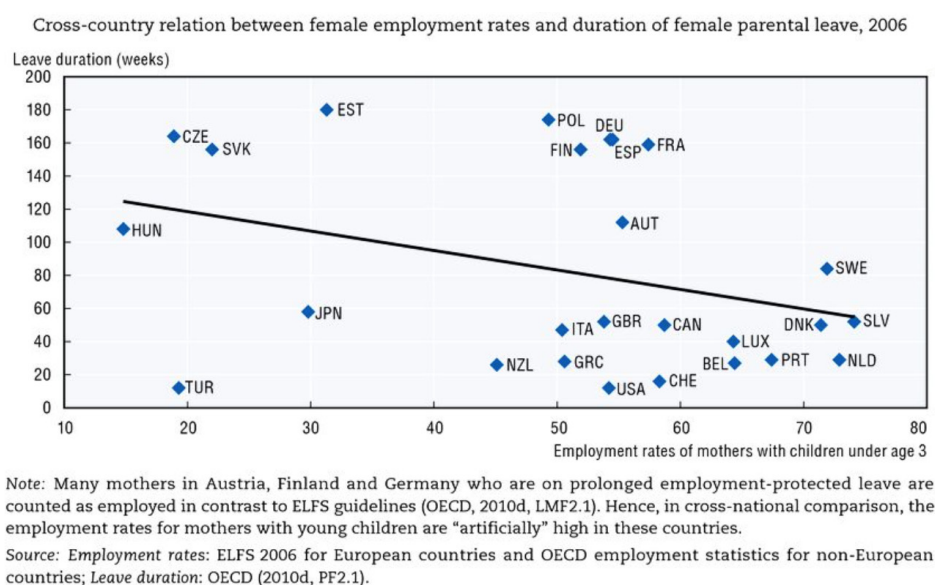
28 Koldinská, 10.

29 Norberto Pignatti, "Encouraging Women's Labor Force Participation in Transition Countries," *IZA World of Labor*, 2016, 5, <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.264>.

establishments increased by 1%.”³⁰ As a result, women’s participation in the labour force in Slovenia increased while the corresponding rates decreased in Estonia.³¹

While evidence shows that paid child-related leave boosts women’s participation in the labour force to a small extent,³² there can also be negative consequences when paid leaves are more than a year long.³³ Long child-related leave programmes can negatively impact women’s upward mobility within their careers as well as disincentivise companies from hiring women over concerns about their prolonged child-related leave allowances.³⁴ The evidence shows that leave periods of shorter durations can have the most positive effect on women’s participation in the labour force when compared to the absence of paid leave or prolonged leave periods (Figure 3).³⁵

Figure 3: Lower Employment Rates for Mothers with Children Below Age 3 in Countries with Longer Leave



With extensive government spending going towards lengthened child-related leave policies, the positive impact of which is highly variable, the question arises of where that money might be put to better use. One possibility is the novel “father’s quota”, a period of optional paid paternity leave which is not transferrable to the mother should the father choose not to take it. This policy is aimed at increasing shared childcare responsibilities between parents.³⁶ Even more impactful than the “father’s quota,” where minimal implementation provides little access to data on its utility, is the provision of childcare services, where abundant evidence points to its positive effect on increasing women’s participation in the labour force.

30 Pignatti, 5.

31 Pignatti, 5.

32 Olivier Thévenon, “Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD,” OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, vol. 145, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, 23 May 2013, 12, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k46civrngms6-en>.

33 Winkler, “Women’s Labor Force Participation,” 8.

34 Winkler, 8.

35 OECD, *Doing Better for Families*, 139, accessed 30 October 2020, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/doing-better-for-families_9789264098732-en.

36 Winkler, “Women’s Labor Force Participation,” 7.

Early Childhood Education Services

Early childhood education services and care (ECEC) have been increasingly recognised as crucial for child development; however, in what ways is the accessibility of ECEC related to women's participation in the labour force? Olivier Thévenon's 2013 analysis of various factors driving female participation in the workforce found that children's enrolment in formal childcare has a more significant impact than paid child-related leave.³⁷ A 2018 OECD study found inaccessibility of ECEC to be linked with low women's labour force participation rates in the Czech Republic and Hungary.³⁸ The Visegrad 4 countries have some of the lowest proportions of children under three enrolled in formal care.³⁹ Despite generous child-related leave policies, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia rank much lower in terms of ECEC-related government expenditures.⁴⁰ This raises the question of whether government allocation of financial resources to families should prioritise access to ECEC, which greatly benefits women's participation in the labour force, over a lengthier child-related leave policy, which, as examined above, has potentially negative repercussions. A balanced approach which prioritises both factors could be beneficial as indicated by research that shows the utility of combining child-related leave with policies that increase access to ECEC.⁴¹

Taxation and Benefits Systems

Taxation and benefits systems are integral to incentivising women's participation in the labour force. When women weigh the costs and benefits of such activity, rewarding taxation and benefits structures can be an important deciding factor. Specifically, women earning lower amounts are statistically more responsive than other women to beneficial changes in taxation.⁴² This phenomenon, called "participation elasticity", "measures the percentage change in the probability of working in response to a small change in net earnings."⁴³ On average, women display more participation elasticity and elasticity in terms of working hours than men, meaning that slight changes in taxation or benefits impact their decision-making more than men's.⁴⁴

So, which taxation structures incentivise or disincentivise women's participation in the labour force? One notable taxation factor which disincentivises women from entering or re-entering the workforce is when taxes and benefits are assessed on a family basis. The implications of this taxation factor lie in the distinction between joint taxation and individual taxation, which is one of the main places where "implicit gender bias" appears in taxation systems.⁴⁵ Joint taxation systems often negatively impact women's participation in the labour force because of what is known as the "secondary earner bias," which occurs because the persistent

37 Thévenon, "Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD," 145:39.

38 OECD, ed., *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017), 3.

39 Thévenon, "Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD," 145:15.

40 Thévenon, 145:15.

41 OECD, *Starting Strong 2017*, 3; Thévenon, "Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD," 145:12.

42 Bettio and Verashchagina, *Fiscal System and Female Employment in Europe*, 9.

43 Bettio and Verashchagina, 43–44.

44 Bettio and Verashchagina, 43–44.

45 Bettio and Verashchagina, 5.

gender wage gap results in women in heterosexual marriages being disproportionately classified as secondary earners.⁴⁶ In a system where taxes are progressively assessed on the basis of joint income, secondary-earner women ultimately pay a higher tax in proportion to their income compared to their male spouses, which can be a crucial determinant of women choosing to work or not.⁴⁷ Flat taxation systems can help offset the disadvantage for women in countries with joint taxation systems by essentially eliminating the difference between individual and joint filing; however, this policy choice is often made without considering its impact on women's participation in the labour force or the important distinction between flat and quasi-flat-rate systems.⁴⁸ Such has been the case in Eastern Europe where fiscal reforms have taken place without any significant focus on their impact on women in the labour market.⁴⁹

The Czech Republic's 2005 and 2008 fiscal reforms provide a tangible demonstration of the impact of taxation systems on women's participation in the labour force and the consequences of policy choices being made without gender considerations.⁵⁰ In 2005, the Czech Republic began to offer voluntary joint taxation, which an estimated 69% to 86% of married couples opted for.⁵¹ A 2014 study performed by Klára Kalíšková found that this resulted in a "2.9 percentage point decline in the employment probability of Czech married women with children compared to unmarried and childless women and compared to the period before joint taxation in the Czech Republic."⁵² In 2008, however, the Czech Republic eliminated the possibility of joint taxation because of the introduction of a flat tax rate, a switch which one might think would benefit women.⁵³ Unfortunately, the change to a flat tax was "accompanied by an extremely large tax deduction for single-earner couples that significantly decreased the work incentives of married women."⁵⁴ Kalíšková found that after the introduction of tax deduction for single-earner couples, husbands of women who were not working were taxed CZK 1,720 less per month.⁵⁵ When women's participation in the workforce is not a priority for legislators and reformers of fiscal systems, sometimes a solution like the introduction of a tax deduction for single-earner couples, aimed at helping lower-income families, can have negative consequences for women and ultimately the state, which is losing GDP from their lack of participation.

In addition, even in systems where the taxation structure helps encourage women's participation in the labour force, jointly assessed benefits can further disincentivise a woman from working. When the choice is between paying exorbitant fees for childcare or housing and not entering or re-entering the workforce, many women choose to stay home or work part-time, the consequences of which were previously outlined. Furthermore, in countries where a "non-working spouse allowance" is granted, even if the tax system does not penalise a sec-

46 Bettio and Verashchagina, 5–6.

47 Bettio and Verashchagina, 6.

48 Bettio and Verashchagina, 96.

49 Bettio and Verashchagina, 96.

50 Bettio and Verashchagina, 96–97.

51 Klára Kalíšková, "Labor Supply Consequences of Family Taxation: Evidence from the Czech Republic," *Labour Economics* 30 (October 2014): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2014.04.010>.

52 Kalíšková, 11.

53 Kalíšková, 3.

54 Kalíšková, 3.

55 Kalíšková, 3.

ond-earner, a woman making less than her male spouse may be strongly discouraged from working to avoid losing the allowance.⁵⁶ In the Czech Republic, for instance, universal social assistance, child allowances/credits or benefits, housing benefits, and in-work benefits are all assessed against family income, thus presenting families with a difficult decision regarding the employment of the partner who earns less, statistically speaking, usually the female spouse in a heterosexual partnership.⁵⁷ Data gathered from OECD 2007 country chapters and national reports showed that “the overwhelming majority of the 15 countries with individual taxation use family income to determine the amount of two or more benefits, especially social assistance and housing benefits, which are among important benefits.”⁵⁸ While these structures help lower-earning households, they can negatively impact women by constituting an implicit tax for the lower-earning partner who chooses to work and thus loses benefits and allowances.⁵⁹

Conclusions and Recommendations

The issue of raising women’s participation in the labour force cannot be solved with quick fixes and demands a solution which takes into account the interconnected web of policy choices, cultural influences, and global challenges exacerbating pre-existing barriers to women wanting to enter into paid work. In some cases, policymakers and world leaders are faced with the choice between benefitting one group and negatively impacting another, yet when it comes to the global economy and raising women’s participation in the labour force, there is no such difficult choice to make; facilitating increased participation of women in the workforce greatly benefits economies around the world, which is particularly needed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While much of this paper has focused on the obstacles preventing equal participation in the workforce, the goal should be to look forward at what can be done to improve the situation and to consider what policies have made a positive impact. Presently, immediate assistance is needed for the women disproportionately and directly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Promoting women-owned and women-run businesses during the pandemic not only benefits women but the economy at large. Current anti-discrimination legislation needs to be bolstered by supplemental support systems. When choices are being made between allocating government funds towards child-related leave versus the provision of childcare services, the optimal combination is a short leave period with abundant and inexpensive childcare services. Finally, reforms to taxation and benefits systems should be made with women specifically in mind, and countries should prioritise the implementation of individual taxation and/or a flat-rate tax, insofar as they alleviate implicit gender bias in taxation.

56 Bettio and Verashchagina, *Fiscal System and Female Employment in Europe*, 25.

57 Bettio and Verashchagina, 26; Bettio and Verashchagina, 18–89.

58 Bettio and Verashchagina, *Fiscal System and Female Employment in Europe*, 26.

59 Bettio and Verashchagina, 36.

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Chapter 2

ARE WE REALLY THAT DIFFERENT?

The differences between female and male leadership and opportunities in the areas of medicine, science, and business in the Visegrad Group

Introduction

Cultural beliefs create and emphasise gender stereotypes, and valuing these beliefs leads to stereotyped thinking about genders themselves. Gender stereotypes describe stereotypic beliefs about women and men and prescribe how men and women “should” behave. So it is no surprise when those same assumptions are brought into the workplace. Stereotypes of women as warm and nurturing and of men as cold and authoritarian, for example, may have contributed to the perception by some that women may be less effective in leadership positions.

Studies have repeatedly shown that the traits most commonly associated with successful leaders are those that align with stereotypically male behaviours and rarely promote women. In most industries, women are over-represented in support functions while there is lack of role models for women in leadership positions. Encouragingly, there have been several findings that men and women are equally effective leaders, unless the leadership role is “gendered”, i.e. if there are expectations that the leader needs to be a man or a woman (Radu et al. 2017).

Social science has shown that men and women have more similarities than differences in a wide range of characteristics, from personality traits to ability and attitude — and that these factors have a larger effect on career outcomes than biology does. As has been proven extensively, personality, values, beliefs, ethics and morality are relevant to leader effectiveness. This makes us wonder if the key aspects of character significant to leadership (self-confidence, humility, responsibility, etc.) are gender-specific or rather individual differences that are not linked to gender? (Hyde 2005)

Our article focuses on finding a response to the question whether we are really that different. In other words, it considers **the possible differences between leadership opportunities given to women and men in three areas of work: medicine, science and business in the Visegrad Group** for which we use the methodology of reviewing and representing literature using the Visegrad Group as the data source.

In addition to our main objective, we hope to show women’s presence, competencies and potential, as well as positively influence leadership practice with our advice for future female leaders and employers of future female leaders.

I. Dear Doctor, Are You Female? - Medicine

Medicine is quite a hermetic environment. There are some specialisations where almost 90% of the medical staff is male, for example, surgery. Although an increasing number of female doctors want to be surgeons, it is still a minority. An article in *The Guardian* of December 2019 stated that “men in medicine are judged largely by their accomplishments, while women in medicine must answer for their attire, attitude and ambition”. This does not sound like equal opportunity. Can we hope that the world is changing? (*Appendix figure3*)

Change is coming, but slowly. The number of women researchers is increasing, but there, too, women are still a minority. An analysis conducted across all continents shows that worldwide, women make up less than 30% of scientists. Furthermore, considering the ration of men and women in leadership positions in medicine, women still are a minority.

In a recently published article about dual MD-PhD degree programmes, the treatment of different genders was emphasised. It was revealed that male and female students were equally likely to present at the annual programme symposium, but faculty and keynote presenters were more likely to be male. What is more, women were asked fewer questions and obtained less support. All the above-mentioned aspects have an impact on the number of female PhD students and lead to the realisation that in the area of medicine the chances given to men and women to become leaders are quite different.

There is also a substantial difference in wages between men and women. In one survey (including 36,000 physicians from the US), the female doctors were paid substantially less (about 26.5% lower) than their male colleagues. Interestingly, according to researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, even in the case of Ob/Gyn practitioners where women outnumber men, they still earn less. This is especially visible in Ob/Gyn Fertility divisions. The study shows that even if hours worked or years in practice are taken into account, a female specialist will earn \$67,000 less than her male counterpart per year. It is impressive how gender still influences salary nowadays. This raise the question: is there any way for female doctors and researchers to achieve greater success in medicine?

Then there are the non-material aspects of medical work. Some studies show that women are preferred by patients in some medical procedures. For example, in the Ob/Gyn specialty, there is a population of patients that are uncomfortable with male doctors and prefer to be examined by a female gynaecologist.

Why is this the case? Are there any differences between the working style of female and male gynaecologists?

According to a recently published article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, female primary care physicians spend more time with their patients than male doctors — an average of an additional 2.4 minutes per visit, to be specific. Treatment by a female doctor reduces the rate of hospitalisations. Thus, the underestimation of women in medicine should change. Moreover, female doctors can also introduce different views on patients – beyond their health status. Female and male doctors work differently; maybe the key is not change, but assimilating these gender differences?

It is important to understand and appreciate how gender has the potential to optimise and increase effectiveness in the workplace, as well as with respect to leadership.

Considering the above, in our opinion, the aim should not be for women and men to be equal in everything. The goal is for women to choose what they want in medicine and for women and men to be treated as equals based on their education rather than gender, which does not have to translate into identical way of working.

This year showed us how important it is to be a team player. The COVID-19 epidemic forced us to rearrange our work irrespective of gender. All doctors are equal in fighting Sars-Cov-2 infection, and all are heroes. Maybe this situation will open our eyes, and make us see that not gender, but medical background is essential for effective patient treatment. We are not the same, but both female and male doctors are essential to hospitals, struggling everyday with pandemic that is spreading at the speed of light.

II. The Rocket Girls of the V4 - Science

Women scientists have always been rare, especially in the past, most likely due to prejudice and myths connected to women's traditional roles in the family as wives and mothers. Luckily, nowadays the situation is changing, and women are also becoming more and more equal to men in the scientific world (*Clifton et al. 1976*).

Some interesting observations were found while comparing the percentage of women working in research in European countries (Appendix figure 1). The highest percentage was found in North Macedonia (52.3%) and the lowest in the Netherlands (25.8%), which according to the map of women's share of employment in the research sector by Shannon *et al.* (Appendix figure 2) might mean that in countries with fewer science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) employment opportunities, women are more involved than men.

Comparison of data from V4 countries showed that Serbia has the highest percentage of women in research – 50.0%, followed by Poland – 36.4%, Hungary – 30.8% and Czech Republic – 26.8% (*Stoet & Geary, 2018*). This gives rise to a question: do these countries offer different opportunities to female and male scientists to develop?

In the last decade, many EU countries have tried to find a way to promote gender equality in research and science. According to the latest information, in 2014 Poland started the programme 'Babies in Academia', which provides financial support to universities. Cooperation between UNESCO and the Ministry of Science and Education allows L'Oréal to offer scholarships to women in science. The Perspektywy Education Foundation manages national campaigns to promote technical and engineering studies (*EIGE, Poland*). Hungary, on the other hand, created 'The National Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality' for the years 2010-2021. The goal of this strategy is to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions to at least 40% (*IEGE, Hungary*). The government of the Czech Republic adopted a 'Governmental Strategy for Equality of Women and Men', whose aim was to achieve position-related equality in science, research and innovation in 2014-

2020. The ‘Technology Agency of the Czech Republic’ was the first public organisation in the country to help fund applied research (*IEGE, Czechia*).

As a result, it can be said that our region is focusing significantly on increasing the number of female scientists. But what can female scientists offer that their male counterparts cannot?

Let us take the story of ‘Rocket Girls’ as an example of the power of female commitment and teamwork. The moniker refers to American scientist, Barbara Paulson, who was working as a ‘human computer’ at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in 1950s, and her team of female physicists. In 1961, when she was expecting her first child, the company refused to let her go on maternity leave and decided to fire her instead. Only a few months after giving birth, Barbara got an offer from her previous supervisor, Helen Ling, who wanted her to get back to the laboratory and work as part of a team of ‘mothers’. They managed to take care of their children while working by bringing them to the laboratory. Thanks to their collaboration and cooperation they managed to become an iconic group of women who got a second chance as mother scientists (*Holland, 2018; Smithsonian Magazine, 2016*).

As a takeaway from this chapter, we can acknowledge that most European countries seem to be on a very good path to supporting young women starting in high school through special study opportunities, scholarships, or events like the ‘Girls’ day’ in Hungary during which universities are trying to attract high school girls to study in STEM fields. The NASA example proves that having a family (often used as an argument against women becoming leaders) cannot stop women from achieving success if they are really determined.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected non-essential branches (e.g. laboratories that do not participate in developing COVID tests, vaccines, medicaments, etc.) of research all over the world. Most non-essential research was shut down completely or switched to a ‘remote’ mode, and only essential researchers in laboratories and fieldwork were at still at work (*Radecki & Schonfeld, 2020*). Nowadays, even though the pandemic might not be over yet, research is facing a restart, but with tangible consequences, especially because in most cases financial support was either suspended completely or significantly lowered. Only time will show us how the future of STEM will look in the next couple of years with all these changes.

III. Conquering the C-suite - Business

When we hear the word “leader”, certain characteristics commonly come to mind. They usually involve a masculine figure and are not viewed as favourably when represented by women. To use more recent examples, let us think back to our history schoolbooks. How many of the historic leaders in these books were women?

The next question leads directly from the previous one. Where are women today? If we take the leaders in the corporate sector into consideration, we can see that, for instance, only 25% of Fortune 500 CEOs are female. (*American Association of Women, 2016*) It would be interesting to compare the international rating to our V4 region.

Fortunately, according to a study from the same year, the Visegrad countries have exceeded the international figures: 41% of Polish, 39% of Hungarian, 35% of Slovakian and 25% of Czech leaders are women. (*Central Statistics Office of Hungary, 2016*) However, more than 50% of leaders are men in the Visegrad countries. What is the reason for this? What abilities do businesses require from their leaders that men possess and women do not?

During our research on this question, we came to the realisation that nowadays in our region the qualities or characteristic that are most in demand in the business community when it comes to a leader are soft skills rather than hard skills.

For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, a Chief Executive Officer had to have strong accounting and analytical skills, but had a relatively narrow scope of responsibility, concentrated only on a small group of direct reports. In contrast, today, a CEO has to reach out to and lead a much wider “crowd”. Being supportive, honest and a good team player, having a vision, self-confidence, being able to motivate, to share success and create an atmosphere of growth are all more important skills in a leader today than, e.g. having strong analytical skills. Professional, business-specific skills come with time and experience as the manager climbs up the career ladder. However, once he or she reaches a C-suite position, technical and functional qualifications matter less than leadership and strong fundamental knowledge of business (*promanconsulting.hu, 2020*).

Even though the odds of women being promoted to higher positions in the field of business are growing fast, today’s leaders have to face another incredibly challenging new obstacle in leadership: the coronavirus pandemic. It is no doubt true that the global crisis has changed the way we do business: most service providers are forced to work from home. It makes being a leader harder as well, as you cannot monitor your team in person; you have to trust that they will deliver their work on time and it is harder to switch off after work when your “office” is an arm’s length away, etc. Maintaining work-life balance has also become a bigger challenge for mothers with the whole family at home as they try to juggling child care and household chores while handling hundreds of work e-mails and being on constant standby to turn on the camera and look presentable during a meeting. It is harder to separate work and personal life both in space and time.

On the other hand, some women are grateful for the possibility of working from home. They save the time they spent commuting to the office or can deal with small daily household tasks during their breaks. It is easier for them to manage the workload because they can allocate and plan their work more independently, as long as they meet deadlines. However, for the same reason, they are more willing to work overtime which can also often lead to faster burnout since it is harder to separate yourself from work.

Either way, working from home is definitely the most remarkable change in the field of business due to the coronavirus pandemic, and it is likely that the flexibility of working from home will remain an important asset on the job market for candidates in the future as a result.

Considering all the above, we can see the “leader of the future” is no longer characterised by masculine qualities. By highlighting the important features of a leader, we no longer distinguish between men and women in the business area in our region. As a matter of fact, we believe that the rising importance of soft skills actually

favour female leaders because they are considered to be efficient team players, willing to share their successes (the NASA example from the previous parts of our study is proof of this), empathetic, talented at multi-tasking, etc. However, as we can see today, there are always new challenges to face and “mountains to climb” for leaders, against which the ability to adapt to changes is crucial. This ability has become a key characteristic of a leader.

Does this mean the future of business is female? Only the future can tell, but one thing is for sure: women belong everywhere that decisions are being made.

Epilogue – Good Practice

The V4+ Academy of Young Business Women Leaders workshops helped us to realise that workplaces could take several important steps forward by having more female leaders. For instance, such a step could be supporting digitalisation and remote working in the fields where it is possible. This helps women maintain the proper work-life balance to a large extent. Banning questions for job applicants about their salary or history and prohibiting punishment for workers who share salary information is another option. A transparent remuneration policy gives employees information about their value in the workplace. Other examples are stripping job descriptions and ads of gendered language, removing information from CVs such as race and gender, or ensuring balanced interviews in which the same questions are asked of all candidates, using standardised criteria to fairly compare all candidates, and creating promotion or recruitment panels involving members of both genders. Organisations should aspire to embed inclusion and diversity fully in all their practices: how project teams are constructed, how team meetings are run, who gets invited to important company events, who has the opportunity for promotion, or when representatives of the organisation are chosen.

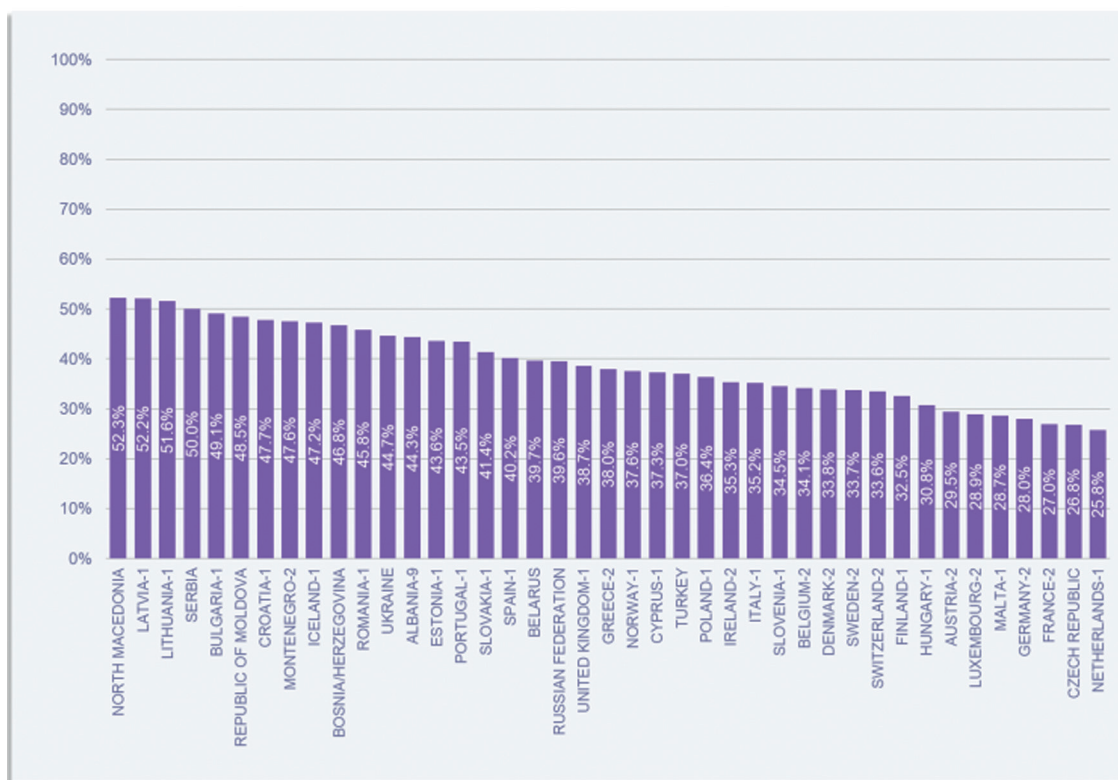
On the other hand, women also have to work together with their employers towards mutual success. They should learn to negotiate their salary and benefits – taking part in training events concerning their specialisation can be a start. Women need to know that asking for help from relatives with childcare does not make them bad mothers. Acknowledging the importance of building a network would also help women go higher and climb the career ladder quicker, with job offers being shared by word-of-mouth.

We hope these suggestions inspire both organisations and individuals to challenge gender differences, model effective behaviours, and shift hiring practices to a system where inclusivity is the new standard.

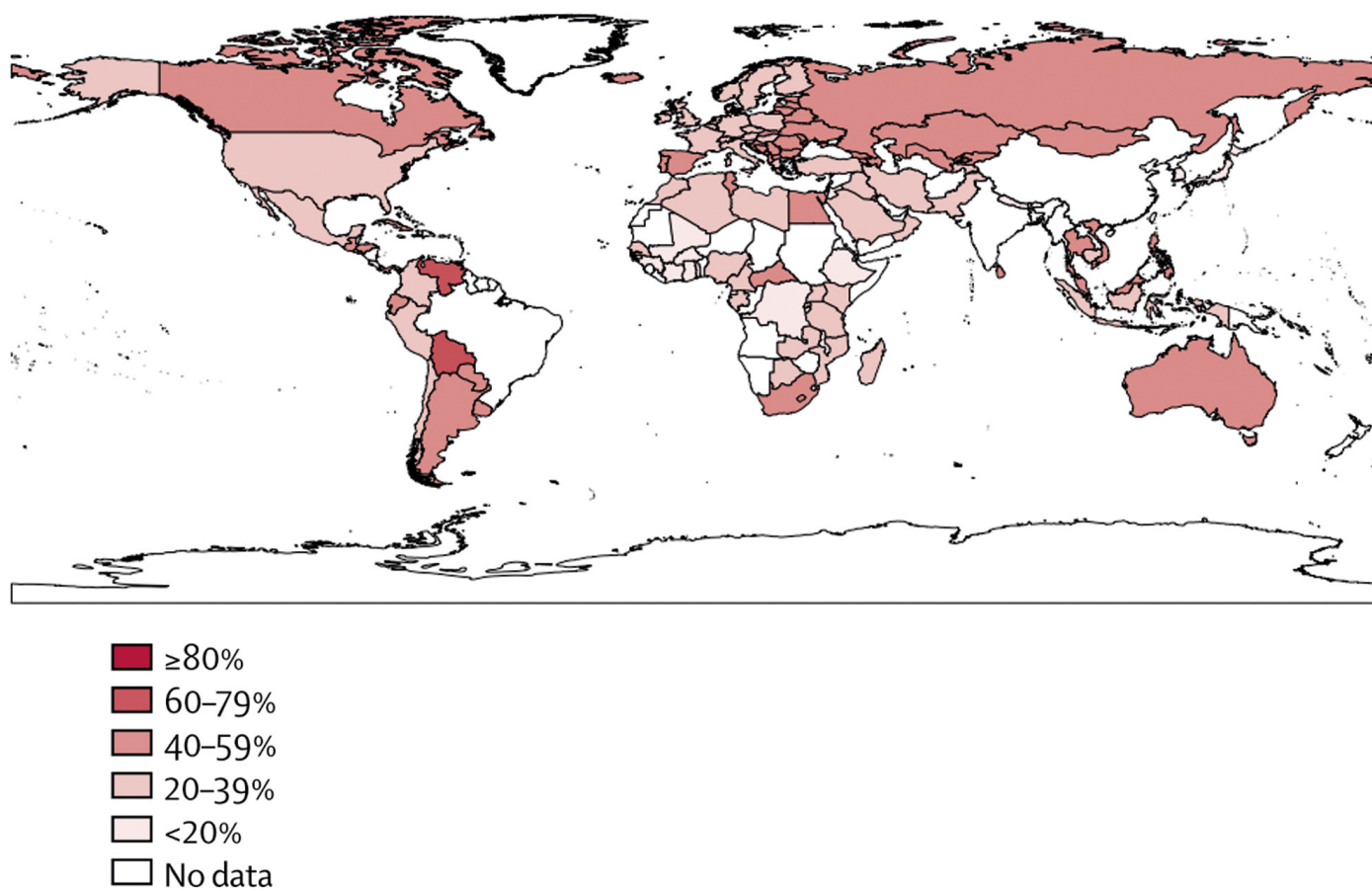
We would like to thank *Fundacja im. Lesława A. Pagi* for the opportunity to be part of this programme, which helped us realise that our success does depend on us, provided we are brave enough to see it and reach for success.

Appendix

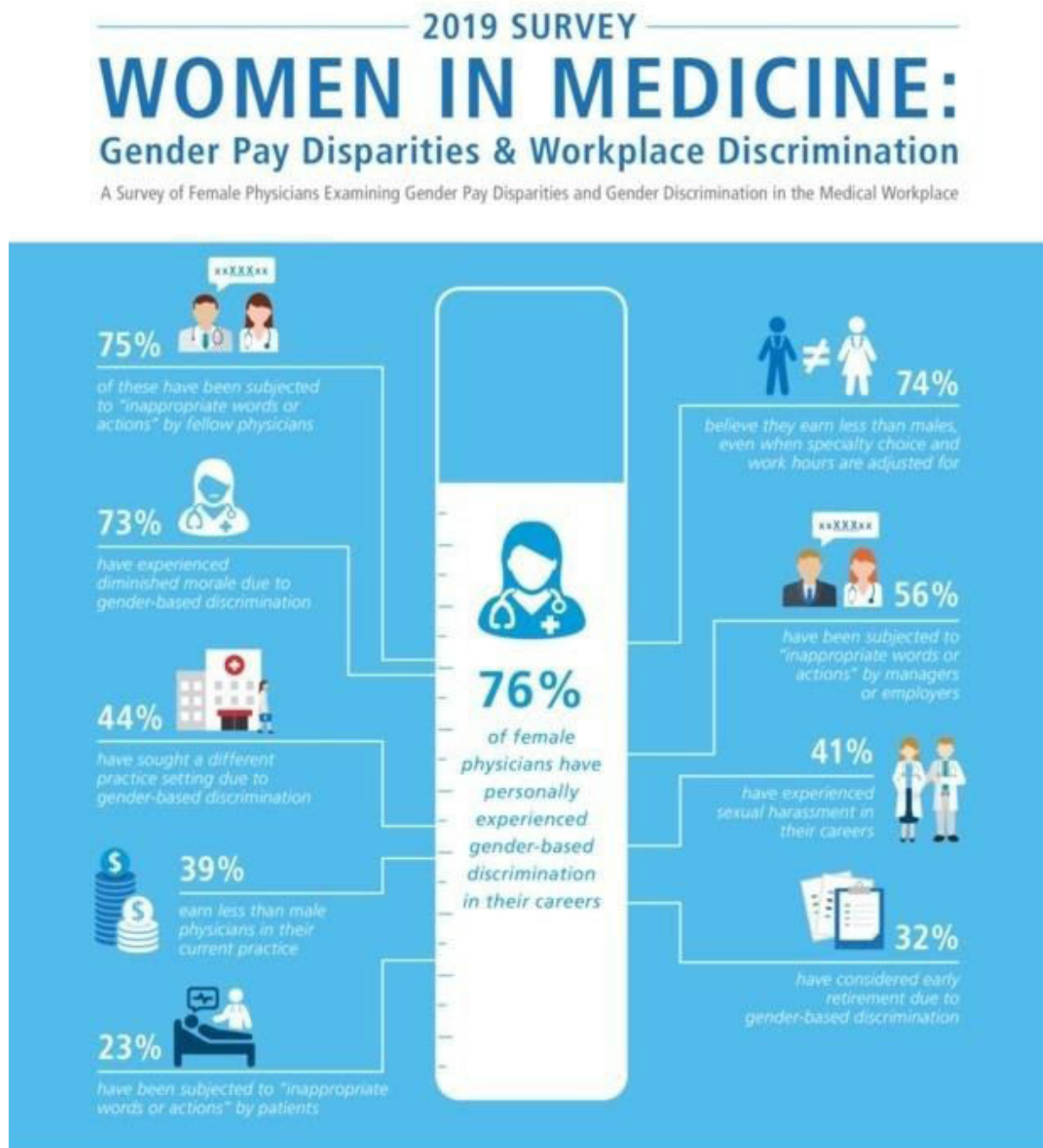
Appendix figure 1: Participation of female researchers in Europe (UNESCOstat, 2019).



Appendix figure 2: Women's share of employment in the research sector (Shannon et al., 2019).



Appendix figure 3: Gender Pay Disparities & Workplace Discrimination (Hawkins, 2019)



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Chapter 3

THE PERCEPTION OF WOMEN LEADERS OVER TIME – LESSONS LEARNED

Traditional historical points of emancipation

Throughout history, women have always been dominated and held little to no power. The female leaders who were able to prove themselves in positions of power were few and far between and exceptions to this rule. Women were considered weaker, less valuable than men and property of men for centuries.

The first feminist movements appeared in the first half of the 19th century with the aim of enacting laws to guarantee freedom of marriage and divorce and the right to own property. Women's associations were usually linked to other social movements, such as nationalist movements in Central Europe, e.g. in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose territory overlaps with most of today's V4 countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

Educating young girls and women became a serious social objective. The first secondary school for girls was established in 1846 in Budapest. However, tertiary education was forbidden for women until the middle 1890s in both Hungary and Poland. A co-educational underground university operated from 1885-1905 in Warsaw, where double Nobel laureate Marie Skłodowska-Curie studied.

The next milestone for equality, the right to vote, was granted to women in 1918 in both Hungary and Poland, and female representatives were elected to parliaments soon afterwards. As early as 1920, women in Czechoslovakia were guaranteed the right to vote under the first Czechoslovakian Constitution.

The First World War inevitably changed the role of women in society, who entered the labour market in huge numbers. Many of them became civil servants or public officials, but most had no chance of promotion out of the lowest positions. Even though an increasing number of women graduated from universities, they still could not achieve full economic independence. However, in the period between the two world wars, women represented over 20% of the labour market and by the late 1930s, almost 30% of university students were female. Nevertheless, traditional role and family models remained dominant.

Enforced equality in Central Europe

Until the introduction of state socialism, all progress was slowly but steadily achieved by the will of the people. Notably, state socialism wanted to emancipate women centrally and radically transform the traditional role of women to fit the idealistic socialist image of a “working woman”. The full employment policy provided many jobs in industrial and agricultural production. Centralisation also offered solutions to reduce family obligations, such as public day care and communal eating places. Nevertheless, the need to increase the birth rate resulted in the introduction of maternity leave and other benefits.

By law, women were required to be employed, but social resistance resulted in lower wages and fewer chances of promotion to high managerial positions, especially for those who took long-term maternity leave during the most important years of their career. Centrally enforced equality during these decades did not really change traditional values – women were still perceived as primarily responsible for childcare and the household. The double burden of work and family was exhausting and the relative freedom of Western housewives seemed very attractive. Unsurprisingly, the emancipation of Western women progressed slowly but steadily. By 1989, family policy measures promoting greater equality in employment and wage rates were still significantly higher in Central European countries.

Transition to the modern world

From 1989-1991, economic crises, international pressure, and protests initiated historic transformations that caused closer integration between Central European countries and the global capitalist market.

Many measurements recorded during this period demonstrate that women’s participation in the new political and economic systems of Central Europe was lower than that of men. Politically, women all but disappeared from parliamentary offices during the first democratic election with the elimination of the quota system, which was discredited as one of the means by which the Communist Party controlled the selection of candidates.

Resurgent gender discrimination, the withdrawal of state support for childcare and parental leave, weak feminist movements, and low levels of participation by women in parliament were all factors that contributed to the deterioration of women’s equality.

After 1989, dozens of women’s NGOs were formed. Their goals included equal opportunities for women in the workplace and public life, the dissemination of feminist ideas, networking and training, business development, family upbringing, and environmental protection. Several excellent initiatives were launched at that time.

One of the most sudden and painful phenomena of the transition processes in each Central European country was the massive reduction in jobs as a result of restructuring and privatisation. By 1997, employment of women, which had previously exceeded Western European standards, fell sharply and was below the EU average. In 1990, in Hungary, 64.5% of men were economically active compared to only 46.3% of women. In Slovakia, the situation was slightly better with 59.7% of women employed. However, these rates continued to decrease

even further in all three countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) until 2004.

The labour force distribution among different sectors was unequal between women and men everywhere. This type of segregation also contributed to the pay gap, since jobs in certain industries tend to pay more.

Women outnumbered men in professional groups in all countries but were underrepresented in more senior positions. This is partly due to the ‘glass ceiling’ phenomenon that exists worldwide.

The transition from socialism to the capitalist labour market hit women hard, both economically and socially. The loss of jobs affected a lot of families financially. Faced with gender discrimination, women found it more difficult to have their voices heard and participate in the political or business arena.

Women’s place in the 21st century

When our countries joined the EU in 2004, legislation existed to protect women’s rights and gender equality, but enforcement was inconsistent. Early capitalist legislation did not support women in balancing their work and private lives. The idea of a traditional family role was re-introduced and benefits (maternity leave, days off etc.) were cut. Women were under social pressure to ensure the well-being of their children (by staying at home as the primary child carer) instead of focusing on career development. In many countries, religion and conservative values were (and are still) used to prop up the traditional family model even more than during socialist times. At the same time, more and more social benefits have been introduced recently to encourage families to have children (such as Poland’s 500+ programme, introduced in 2015, or paid paternity leaves for new fathers). Childcare benefits were extended to men as well, although to a much smaller extent. Unfortunately, these programmes did not fulfil their primary objective, as the number of new-borns did not significantly increase, but actually dropped.

The ratio of female-male employment in Western Europe reached the level of Central Europe around 2005, while the female-male wage ratio in Western Europe reached the level of Central Europe in the early 2010s, but it is still far higher than in the US. However, women still face many problems in the workplace, such as the pay gap, the sticky floor (poor job prospects due to gender) and the glass ceiling (poor promotion prospects above a certain level in business due to gender). Currently, the pay gap is 22.5%, 19.6%, 14% and 7.7% for the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, respectively. The biggest pay gap is observed statistically within the 35-50 age range, which are the peak career years, as well as prime childbearing years for women. There are also still many jobs considered to be only “for men” or “for women”, which is not due to physical strength or education, but just “common practice” or social bias. This is why it is still tough for women to succeed in many areas, despite their education and passion for the field in question.

Today’s trends show that women are increasingly interested in business and politics. On Hungary’s political scene, there are three women ministers currently involved in the work of the government, and the most important female decision-maker in politics is currently the Minister of Justice. In Poland, there are a growing number of female representatives in parliament (29% in the Sejm and 24% in the Senate). Also, Poland has

already had three female Speakers of the Sejm, three female Prime Ministers and one female Vice President of the EU Parliament. Moreover, due to the restrictions concerning access to abortion in Poland, a group called Women's Strike has been active since 2016 and is supported by various employers (e.g. in the form of an additional paid day off for strike participation). They actively fight for women's right to a safe abortion up to 12 weeks after conception and have a huge impact on current events in Poland. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the number of women in politics is also on the rise; women represent 21% of the Slovak Parliament and there are also three female ministers, compared to four female ministers, 22.5% representation in the Chamber of Deputies and 16% in the Senate in the Czech Republic. Positive trends are visible in the form of increasing representation of women in politics as well as greater visibility of topics related to women and women's rights.

In business, a growing number of women are occupying significant positions, both as leaders and founders. The proportion of female researchers and scientists has been increasing over the years at a faster rate than their male counterparts (5.1% annually from 2002–2009 compared to 3.3% for men).

Our current reality: the impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, from its onset in early 2020, has exacerbated existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life, both in Europe and beyond. Early projections from the International Labour Organisation indicate that 5% of employed women worldwide have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, compared to 3.9% of men. The negative impact of COVID-19 on women is also confirmed by the 2021 report on gender equality in the EU, which highlights persistent gender gaps in employment, unpaid care work and remuneration.

While initial data shows that more men than women are dying from COVID-19, researchers point out that the data are often incomplete and health workers, who are mostly women, are more exposed to significant risks. In addition, women are facing increased domestic violence, shouldering more household tasks, and suffering greater unemployment and poverty.

The current crisis has hit employees hardest in the hospitality, real estate, business, manufacturing, and retail sectors, where women are overrepresented. Due to school closures, working mothers have been forced to juggle full-time childcare alongside their jobs, which has an adverse impact on their work-life balance. The COVID-19 crisis has sped up digitalisation and automation, and women are far more likely to be employed in jobs that are at risk due to automation.

Political empowerment is an area with the largest consistent gender gaps across all regions of the world. Recently, several articles have been published that highlight how women leaders have done a better job dealing with COVID-19. According to the brief of the United Nations, female Heads of State or Government in Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand and Slovakia have been recognised for the rapidity of the responses they have led, despite taking some unpopular decisions (e.g. confinement measures, social distancing and widespread testing), and for the transparent and compassionate communication of fact-based public health information that contributed to reducing the spread of the virus. Although the situation in Slo-

vakia has changed in recent months, Zuzana Čaputová, the first female president in Slovakia, is still the most trustworthy politician in the country.

Women's leadership styles have been characterised as more collective than individual, more collaborative than competitive, and more coaching than commanding. They have been recognised for prioritising human lives above other concerns, or because of their clear and decisive communication. Furthermore, the empathy and care that all these female leaders have communicated has also brought benefits in trying times.

Lessons learned

The 20th century irreversibly changed the social dynamics of Europe. Female emancipation became a reality and most people alive today were born in advanced societies. The long-term effects of state socialism are still present in Central European countries, which may partially benefit women, as seen in the high number of female university students, generous maternity benefits and the socially accepted presence of women in the labour market.

On the other hand, women in Central European countries remain underrepresented in many aspects of decision-making. However, there has been progress in recent decades, which, according to the latest studies, might have been reversed to a certain extent by COVID-19. One tool for achieving greater progress towards gender equality in top management is gender quotas, which could be described as a “necessary evil”. The experience of countries that have introduced binding gender quotas, such as France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, confirms that it has led to a rapid increase of women in boardrooms.

Women's participation in the labour market can be boosted through female entrepreneurship. Women are still underrepresented in this area and COVID-19 has also had a negative impact on this front. Therefore, more equal distribution of household tasks, greater financial backing from banks and support for diversification into more sustainable sectors could be the way to achieve more female entrepreneurship, more innovation, and more growth.

Other options for reducing gender inequality and increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions include reskilling women, reviewing pay levels, or introducing flexible work hours. This could ensure better access for women to the labour market, also in view of the challenges highlighted by COVID-19.

In conclusion, we would like to point out that women represent an irreplaceable part of society, making up half of the population. This means that if we do not include them in decision-making, we lose 50% of the world's brain power. Diversification is the key, and women's participation could enhance economic results, prompt greater investment in social protection, lead to more sustainable peace, and advance climate protection.

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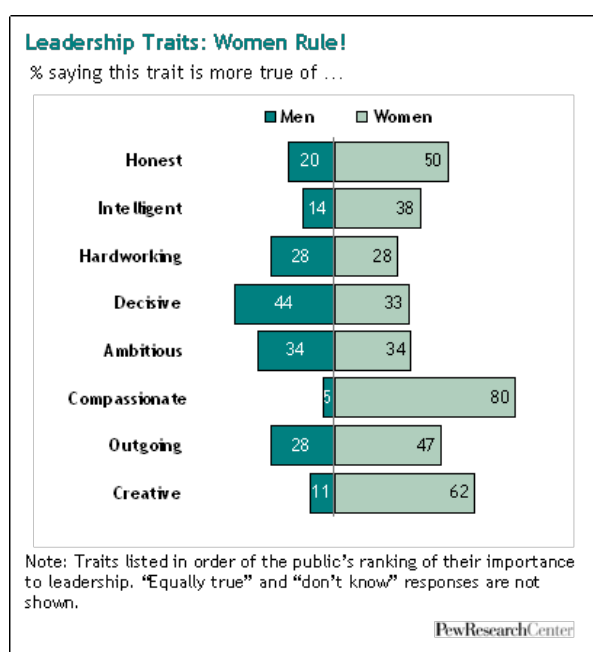
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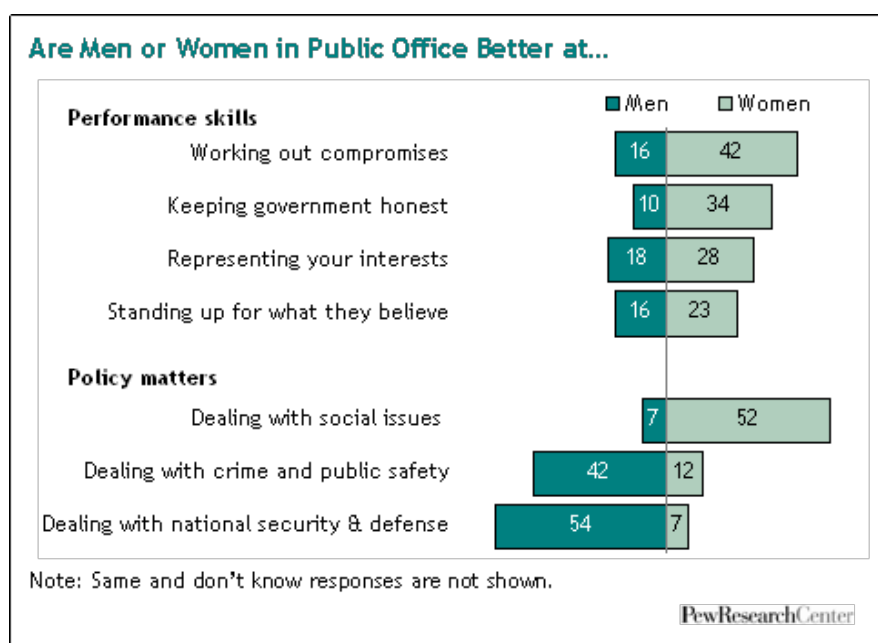
Chapter 4

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

We are all familiar with stereotypes about women. For many years, they have been associated with caregiving roles, empathy and friendliness, all traits that have not typically been considered ‘leadership’ traits. But many sources believe they are in fact crucial leadership traits that women excel at:



Moreover, women also seem to perform more effectively in public offices:

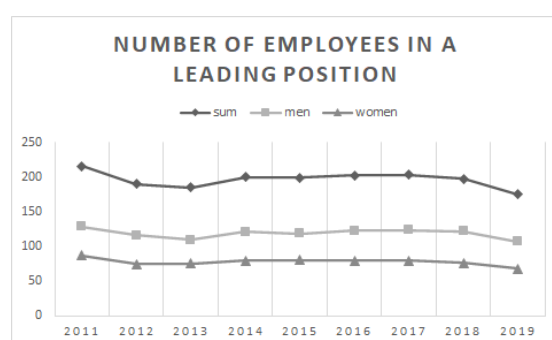
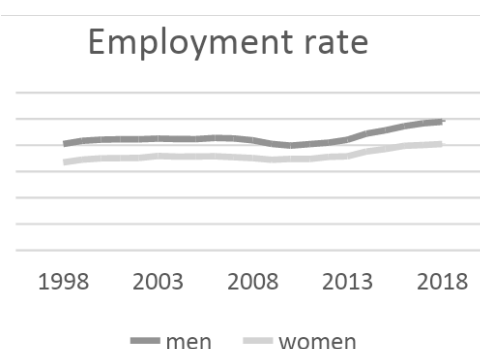


All of this information might even lead us to assume that women are generally more ‘qualified’ to be leaders. When we look at the labour market, we can see ongoing changes related to gender equality, pay gaps, women’s rights, female employment, etc. According to the Mercer report, although there are still more men in executive and senior managerial positions, women are hired more often and leave less frequently, a new trend compared to previous years. But what about politics, a sphere associated with power, money, decision-making and influencing what is happening around the world? Is it a good place for women? We think it is. But what do the data say? The aim of this chapter is to present statistical data and the current situation of women in leadership positions in Hungary, Serbia, and Poland.

Statistical data analysis on women’s employment in Hungary

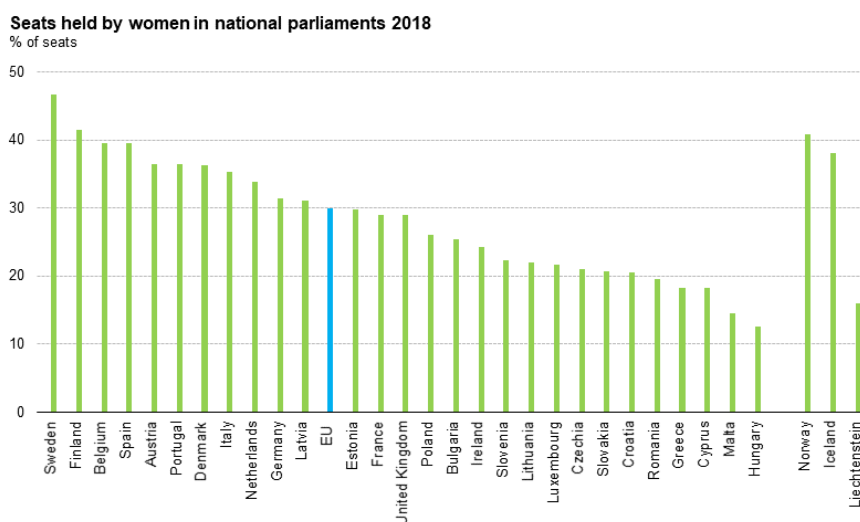
According to the data provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical office, since 1989 the overall employment rate of women has been growing significantly, however the employment gap between men and women has remained almost unchanged, or even increased. The employment of women is constantly expanding, but the employment gap between the two genders is widening, i.e. female employees are still at a disadvantage. The percentage of women in leadership positions, 41%, appears promising. But this figure is misleading because the statistical office includes all types of leadership positions in economic, administrative, advocacy and legislation in their statistics.

If we take a closer look at this pool of leaders, we can see that when compared to men, women are much more likely to hold senior management positions in the public than in the private sector. The deeper we dive, the more striking the sectoral separation of female and male leaders is. Even in the same sector, there are differences in occupational categories: women tend to have higher positions in budgetary areas. The most shocking inequality is found between educational institutions and the IT sector. As more female employees are present in educational institutions than in the IT sector as a whole, they have much greater opportunities to aim higher in the hierarchy. Women still have better chances for promotion in professions that are typically considered female.



Representation of Women in Hungarian Politics

Women around the world are less represented in national parliaments and legislation than men. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 sustainable development goals. In addition to quality education and action on climate change, it includes gender equality. The UN highlights two important aspects of this goal: increasing the proportion of women in important business positions and politics, both on an international and national level.



Source: EIGE (online code: sdg_05_50)

eurostat 

According to Eurostat, Hungary has the lowest share of female politicians. In 2018, Hungary's parliament was only 13% female. Compared to the other V4 countries, Hungary has the lowest percentage of women holding seats. The relevant figure in Poland is 26%, and 21% in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Compared to the previous parliamentary cycle, the proportion of women in the Hungarian parliament improved by one and a half percentage points. In 2014, only 20 out of 199 seats were held by women. Now there are five more female representatives for a total of 25 women in the Hungarian Parliament. As a result, the percentage of women in parliament is 12.6. The Hungarian Parliament thus jumped 10 places in the world ranking: it is now in 153rd place. In 2018, it was just 11th, so this is a significant improvement.

Hungary faces many challenges in the area of gender equality. I would like to mention the Equality Measure 2030 index, which summarises the sustainable development goals related to gender. These goals can help women to play a larger role in politics. Although there are many relevant and measurable aspects of gender inequality, debates about the political representation of women and the number of women leaders have recently gained prominence in Hungarian public discourse.

The participation of women in political and economic leadership is important not only in terms of representation, but also because many studies suggest that it also reduces the level of corruption in specific institutions. This is not true because women are by nature less corrupt – although some research has shown that they are less likely to accept bribes than their male counterparts – but because they have different priorities. For example, involving women in government roles related to education and spending more money on health results in better human capital, which results in a reduction of corruption.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for everyone, but women in particular. Female politicians tend to pay more attention to women's rights in Hungary. In my opinion, this is so important because violence against and mistreatment of women is on the rise, and women should take steps to support other women. It is hard for the government to deal with this situation and handle the pandemic at the same time, but female representatives see it as an important priority. I believe the pandemic has made the situation of women more difficult than ever, so steps really need to be taken on these issues moving forward.

Representation of Women in Polish Politics

The role of female leaders in Polish politics is more multi-dimensional than we might imagine. On one hand, Polish women face a predominantly conservative culture, but they have also inspired, taken part in and launched many initiatives that are defining our times. Last year was a great example of that, marked as it was but some of the most challenging events of our times. The ongoing lockdown, mass protests following the Constitutional Court's decision to delegalise abortion, presidential election – female politicians significantly influenced the course of these affairs.

The first woman that must be mentioned when talking about 2020 is the only female candidate in the presidential campaign – Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska – former Speaker of the Sejm. Due to her boycott of the so-called “envelope” elections, she lost almost all of her endorsements and was later replaced by Rafał Trzaskowski. On the other side of the equation, there was Beata Szydło, who played a key role as the head of the President's campaign team of the incumbent president. Despite this, PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński believes that most of the credit for the win should go not to her, but to Vice President Mateusz Morawiecki.

The decision issued by the Constitutional Tribunal on 22 October 2020 opened a completely new chapter in Polish politics and in the lives of millions of Polish women. Julia Przyłębska and Kaja Godek were key players in these events, with tragic consequences. The Polish government has imposed a near-total ban on abortions, including the termination of pregnancy in cases of foetal defects. The ruling states that abortions may only be permitted in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother's life is in danger.

Compared to other countries with similar cultural influences, Poland compares well in terms of female representation, importance, and competence in foreign policy. In some respects, it often outperforms progressive countries in Scandinavia or Germany, but in others, Poland has a lot to learn. The representation of women in Polish foreign policy is significant, but mainly in offices and diplomacy. In particular, the number of female officials and diplomats dealing with European issues, compared to other spheres of foreign policy, is relatively high.

In national politics, the situation is much worse. In the public sphere – within the media or during debates – men still dominate. In all the analysed situations, women prevail in lower and middle-level positions, where the intensity of work is highest, but without any real influence on decision-making. There are still more men than women in management positions. Recently, however, the activities of women on the Polish political scene have clearly increased. Each year more and more women are involved in political activity, which is no surprise to anyone (according to data from the Interparliamentary Union, the percentage of female parliamentarians in Poland has increased from 13 percent to 24 percent in the last 20 years).

Databases of female experts who could be invited to participate in debates, interviews, or projects would be helpful in increasing the visibility and promoting women in the sphere of foreign policy. While the respondents of a survey among politicians, journalists and scientists conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs together with Heinrich Böll Foundation in 2019 did not express the need to create special formal networks only for women, they all emphasised the great need for informal support between women, especially from more senior women in politics. Some also indicated the potential benefits of creating spaces for women where they could meet and exchange opinions.

Obviously, Polish women have already made some progress. Today, Poland ranks 54th among EU countries, with a parliament that is 29.13% female, and 28% representation of women in ministerial positions. Nevertheless, there are more men than women in the national parliament of every EU Member State. Until 1989, the proportion of women in parliament never exceeded a quarter of the total number of deputies. Moreover, for the first time in the history of the Polish parliament, a woman became the Speaker of the Senate in 1997(!). Currently, the participation of Polish women in political structures is increasing year by year, but it is still low. The most common barriers to women's public activity are institutional, social and cultural limitations. Access to power structures is hindered by stereotypes and traditional gender roles, which leaves little room for female political involvement. The media are also not allies of women, often maintaining the stereotypical image of a woman in the private sphere. And while 42% of women were on the election lists to the parliament, many were ranked in a way that gave them no chance of being elected: only 21% of women were in “number one” spots (the position that offers the greatest chances of election success).

So, do Polish women have anything to be happy about? Certainly, the statistics showing the participation of women in Polish politics seem positive. But the question is whether this indicates actual gender equality in this sphere. One common practice, also found in Poland, is restricting women's access to specific areas of political activity. There is still a deeply entrenched stereotypical division between areas traditionally “reserved” for women, such as culture, education or social spheres. This division is balanced by the presence of women in the ministries of interior affairs, science and higher education. In this case, however, the unequal treatment has a different dimension. For example, some politicians and members of the media accused the (then) Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz of hiring unqualified individuals for these positions, and the heads of ministries were referred to as “doggies sitting in Kopacz's office”. Male representatives in the government never had to make excuses for such decisions.

Of course, politics not only happens in the parliament, the senate or within the government; it also concerns social issues, such as, for example, human rights. Here, in light of the recent decisions of the Constitutional Tribunal, it is worth mentioning the National Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet), which has actively organised protests against attacks on abortion rights in Poland: over 430,000 people on the streets in over 410 Polish cities. These were the largest demonstrations in Poland since the political transformation in 1989, and all thanks to a group led by women. One of them is Marta Lempart. Her public and wide-ranging involvement did not start with the Women's Strike. A decade ago, Lempart worked at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People. Over the years, she dealt with issues related to the disabled, including adjusting Polish law to international regulations on state aid for the employment of people with disabilities. She is also a co-author of the act on sign language.

In the world of social media, where information can go viral in just a few seconds, engaging in politics and having an impact is much easier. Two examples of this are Polish activists Klementyna Suchanow and Marta Frej. Klementyna is a writer, translator, and the originator of the #ToJestWojna hashtag, which now engages a lot of people on social media on the topic of the strike. Marta is a graphic designer whose graphics have accompanied the protesters from the very beginning. These examples show that being a female leader in politics can mean either professional politics or political activism. Whatever the path, the important thing is to make a difference and make your environment a better place.

The pandemic has not been particularly favourable for women in Poland. Restrictions were introduced mainly in the tourism, gastronomy, beauty and entertainment industries, areas predominated by women where employment is most often based on contracts of mandate that can be quickly terminated. According to the report "Mama-Warszawianka" prepared by the Foundation "Fundacja Sukcesu Pisanego Szminką", 24% of interviewees lost their jobs, 28% had their salary reduced, 12.6% of which received wage cuts of 20% to 50%. Women between the ages of 18-34 are at the biggest risk of losing their jobs. According to the report, one third of women work more than they used to before the pandemic (around 30 minutes to almost two hours more per day). With respect to work-life balance, half of the interviewees have children that attend nursery/kindergarten/school, facilities that have been repeatedly closed and reopened throughout the pandemic. Thus, mothers often need to manage both work from home and child care. Even though 67% of them claim that they receive support from their partners, more than 50% say they have more household chores.

Nevertheless, the crisis triggered by the pandemic is a great opportunity to see that there are some political leaders that we can consider role models. Female leaders of state showed marvellous strategic responses to the COVID-19 outbreak from the very beginning. One of these leaders is Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, whose preventive strategy resulted in a very organised response to the pandemic and media panic. The actions were taken quickly and decisions were made based on long-term goals.

On 15 March, when New Zealand had only 100 confirmed cases and no deaths, it closed its borders to foreign travellers and made returning citizens quarantine for 14 days.

Then, 10 days later, it introduced full lockdown measures, which were strict by international standards. Only grocery stores, pharmacies, hospitals and gas stations could stay open, vehicle travel was restricted, and social interactions were limited to those within households. Obviously, the fact that the country is separated from others helped, but only with good management and leadership was the goal achievable. The prime minister was always present, willing to answer any questions from the public and explain numerous times why certain decisions were made. Consistent messaging about prioritising health, frequent communication and daily PM press conferences addressed directly to the population — including children — helped to achieve buy-in from the public. Jacinda Ardern and all of New Zealand showed the world how to overcome problems like this.

Women's political rights and representation in Serbia

Beginnings of female independence in Yugoslavia

An important thing to clarify from the start is that the literature on this subject features the sentence “Women were given the right to vote in 1945 in Yugoslavia”. This is grossly incorrect. Women gained the right to vote by participating and fighting in the national liberation war. One should say women fought for their rights. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Yugoslavian women fought in World War II.

On 11 August 1945, women in Yugoslavia gained the right to vote for the first time. Voting rights for women were confirmed in 1941 in the Documents of the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, which at that time were in force in the territories liberated from Nazi occupation.

Women first exercised their right to vote after World War II, in the election for the Constituent Assembly in November 1945. This was a historic moment for women in Yugoslavia, because they voted alongside men for the first time.

The 1946 Constitution proclaimed equal rights for women, especially employed women who had at their disposal institutions that helped them to function in professional roles, such as kindergartens and retirement homes as well as chances to advance in work with equal pay for both genders.

Despite legal equality and the presence of women in study programmes and jobs that were predominantly male, maintaining the household and raising children was still considered a woman's job. One of the best benefits offered to women one year of maternity leave with full pay, one of the positive legacies of socialism which is still in force.

“A society in which a female voice is not heard is not less feminine, it is less human.” - Mary Robinson, Irish politician

Serbia today

A major breakthrough was expected when Ana Brnabić became the first female Prime Minister in 2017. She is the first woman and openly gay person to hold the office. This may have influenced and encouraged younger generations, but no major changes happened, especially in the field of LGBTQ rights. Sadly, even though the prime minister should hold great power, she seems to be following the lead of the president, who appears to have accumulated all the power. Again, it seems like even women in positions of power are beholden to men and are more figureheads than leading decision-makers. For example, in 2011, the election law was changed, guaranteeing 1/3 of seats in the national parliament to women. Currently, there are 84 women and 166 men in parliament. There is a flaw in the system though: according to the study “Analysis of Gender Equality in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia”, when a female MP loses her mandate, resigns, or goes on maternity leave, despite the quota, she is not necessarily replaced by a woman, but by the next candidate on the electoral list. Since the number of women on electoral lists is almost always reduced to the legal minimum, this means that the next person on the list is likely a man.

This reinforces patriarchal patterns which are deeply embedded in Serbian society. According to data from September 2019, women were mayors in only 12 municipalities in Serbia, while there were 23 municipalities with 0 female representatives in town councils. Today, there are only 9 female ministers out of 23 ministries in the Government of Serbia. The numbers are very encouraging, but women still face widespread sexism from colleagues in their own political parties.

When it comes to managerial positions, according to data collected by the USAID Project of cooperation for economic development for 2020, based on surveys of 1,000 companies, 29% of companies are managed by men and women, 18% are managed by women and 53% of the companies are managed by men.

This also shows that women often dominate in positions with lower pay, such as judges, teachers and caretakers, while men pursue careers as attorneys, doctors, IT specialists.

Clearly, there is room for improvement and true equality, where the phrase “THAT’S A NICE JOB FOR A WOMAN” will become a thing of the past.

We believe that a woman’s place is everywhere, including in politics. As a gender, women have already made significant progress in the process of breaking the glass ceiling. Nevertheless, the data in this paper shows that there is still a long way to go before women truly become leaders in this world. At this time, only 22 countries have an elected female head of state or government, while 119 nations have never had a woman leader, according to UN Women. Data shows that at the current rate, parity will not be reached in national parliaments before 2063, and in ministerial positions before 2077.

What can we do to change that? Learn, grow and support each other. Write papers like this one to fill the gaps in knowledge about inequality, to show young generation what has changed and that change is possible. With baby steps and constant growth as a society, we can achieve this. And society as a whole will surely benefit from it. As was once said by Barack Obama on BBC Singapore: “I’m absolutely confident that for two years

if every nation on earth was run by women, you would see a significant improvement across the board on just about everything... living standards and outcomes.” And we agree. Why? Across the globe, women are at the helm of institutions carrying out effective and inclusive COVID-19 responses, from the highest levels of decision-making to frontline responses. Countries with women who are heads of state such as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Germany and Slovakia have been internationally recognised for the effectiveness of their response to the pandemic. These women leaders were proactive in responding to the threat of the virus, implementing social distancing restrictions early, seeking expert advice to inform health strategies and unifying the country around a comprehensive response with transparent and compassionate communication. And that is truly inspiring.

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Equal Measures 2030 – an independent civil society and private sector-led partnership – envisions a world where gender equality is achieved, and every girl and woman counts and is counted. To achieve this, we connect data and evidence with advocacy and action, helping to fuel progress towards gender equality.

Source: <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/who-we-are/>

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Chapter 5

GENDER INCLUSION IN THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – STUDY OF THE V4+ REGION

Abstract: This paper presents gender inequality in management boards in major companies according to the national stock exchange indexes, all of which are part of the V4+ region. The quantitative part of the research shows that despite this trend, women are still largely underrepresented in the management boards across the countries in question: Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Serbia. To explore the reasons behind this, the paper includes interviews with two businesswomen who provided specific and inspirational insights on female participation in executive positions. Finally, the paper discusses the rationale behind ensuring gender equality in management boards, all of which leads to a firm conclusion: boardrooms need more women and greater overall diversity.

“In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders.”

Sheryl Sandberg

In the 21st century, more than 100 years after Clara Zetkin and her comrades began fighting for women's right, it seems that we still have a long road in front of us. There are still people who degrade women based solely on their gender and traditionally attached stereotypes about “the weaker sex”. Even though the genders are equal by law (both national and international), this is not reflected at the top of the entrepreneurial structure. According to Deloitte's analysis¹, only 16.9% of board seats, out of 8,648 companies analysed, are held by women. Even though these numbers are not ideal, the constant rise in the percentage of female leaders as well as the push for public disclosure about company structures and policies brings attention to the division of power by gender. The existing gender gap ultimately has not stopped women from opening their own businesses and becoming CEOs of their own companies with support from other women, a trend we hope will continue to become more widespread.

Our research was inspired by our career goals, concerns and interests regarding business, as well as by women around us. Amazing women from our home countries, along with our equally amazing mentors from the V4+ Academy of Young Business Women Leaders have inspired us to see where, how, and even how much women

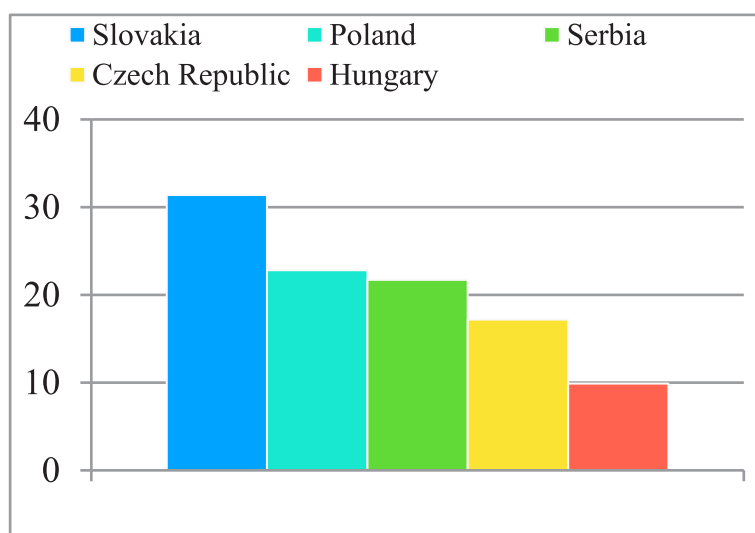
¹ Deloitte: Data-driven change - Women in the boardroom. A global perspective. Sixth edition, 2019, <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Risk/gx-risk-women-in-the-boardroom-sixth-edition.pdf>.

are being represented in executive boards of the important national companies. The first part of the research consists of an analysis of executive boards in major companies from the five countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia. The second part is an interview with two exemplary role models – Šárka Prát and Jana Brodani from the V4+ Academy, who shared their opinions and experience of succeeding in the business world. Our ultimate goal, aside from raising awareness and presenting the statistics, is to inspire and encourage our colleagues, as well as anyone who this report reaches.

STUDY OF THE V4+ REGION

In 2020, women held 30% of boardroom positions in the largest public companies listed on stock exchanges across Europe². Within the V4+ region, only Slovakia can claim a higher average than the overall European score, with 31.4% of female representatives on boards. The other countries of the region fall strikingly behind, with Poland achieving the rate of 22.8%, followed by Serbia – 21.7%, the Czech Republic – 17.2%, and Hungary ranking the lowest with only 9.9% of women on corporate boards³.

Figure 1. Percentage of women on corporate boards in the largest public companies listed in the V4+ region.



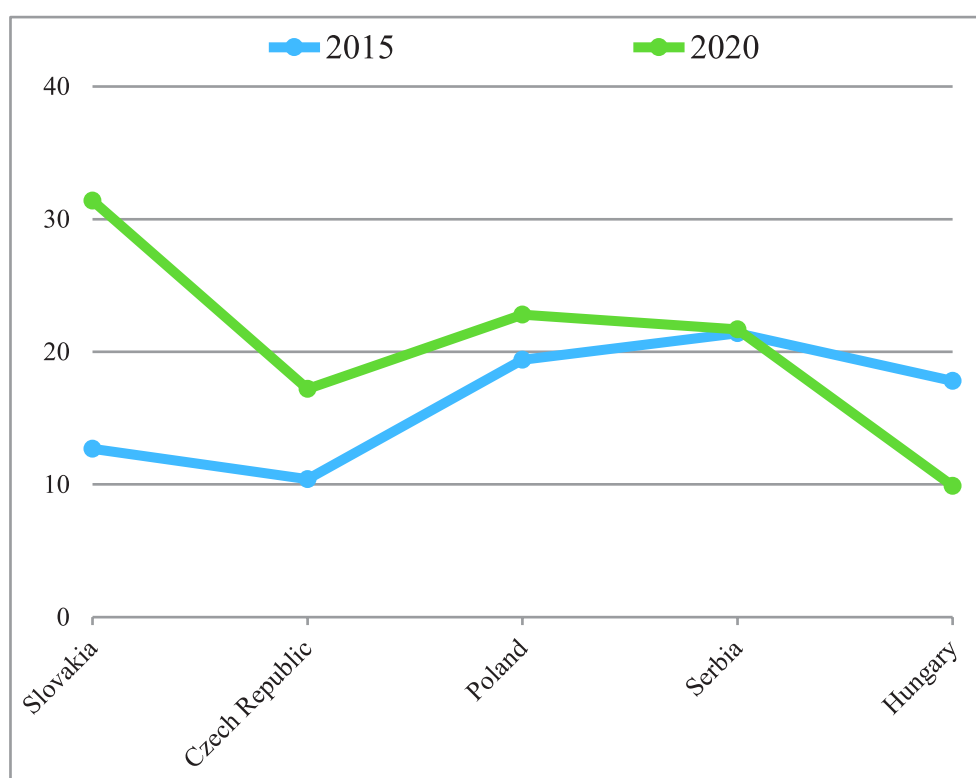
The V4+ countries significantly vary in terms of the pace of the progress they are making towards achieving boardroom gender equality. Over the past 5 years, the largest gains in that respect were recorded in Slovakia, with an impressive increase of 18.7%, and the Czech Republic, marking progress of 6.8%. Poland and Serbia recorded little to no change in terms of female board members (3.4% and 0.3% increase, respectively), whereas Hungarian companies reported a drop of 7.9% in women on public company boards⁴.

² European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database - Largest listed companies: presidents, board members and employee representatives. Accessed 07.02.2021, https://eige.europa.eu/lt/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_bus_bus_wmid_comp_compbm

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

Figure 2. Comparison by % of women on corporate boards in the V4+ countries in 2015 and 2020.



The above data clearly indicate that despite the general upward trend in enhancing gender parity in business, women are still largely underrepresented on company boards. The analysis of the 20 largest listed companies in each of the V4+ countries reveals a striking number of public companies with no female board members at all. In that respect, a zero value applies to 8 Hungarian, 5 Slovakian, 12 Czech, 3 Serbian and 6 Polish companies⁵.

Another alarming trend relates to stark gender disparities in companies with relatively large leadership structures. In the Polish PKO Bank Polski, out of 20 seats on the company's governing bodies⁶, only 1 is held by a woman. Similarly, one of the leading energy companies in Europe, the Czech ČEZ Group, has only 2 female representatives in its 19-member governing structure. In the Hungarian company 4iG Nyrt., a company dealing with software & IT services, out of 21 eligible positions across the executive board, board of directors, supervisory board and the audit committee, only 3 are held by women⁷. Another striking example is the largest Serbian oil company, NIS, with only 2 female board members out of 11 overall.

These examples show that regardless of country and industry, the gender gap in corporate boards is undeniable. Luckily, it appears that the countries of the V4+ region have recognised this issue and gradual steps are being taken to enhance gender equality in business. Although none of the V4+ countries has adopted legisla-

⁵ Analysis of 20 largest companies listed on: Budapest Stock Exchange, Bratislava Stock Exchange, Prague Stock Exchange, Belgrade Stock Exchange and Warsaw Stock Exchange.

⁶ 9 members of the management board and 11 members of the supervisory board.

⁷ One female on the 10-member executive board, and one combining functions on the supervisory board and the audit committee.

tive quotas for women serving on corporate boards, there are certain initiatives in place to foster the process, e.g. the Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in the Czech Republic for 2014-2020, the National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic (2014-2019), or the Serbian National Gender Equality Strategy (2016-2020). Although many bottom-up initiatives are being developed, including the Hungarian Egyenlítő Foundation aiming to empower women leaders, and the CFA Society Poland with its “Women on Boards and Company Performance” report⁸.

Why Are There So Few Women In The Boardroom?

The second part of the research involved interviews with experienced women in business in order to find out their opinions on the results from the quantitative part of the paper and suggestions on how to improve the current situation in the workplace. We conducted interviews with Šárka Prát, Board Member of the European Liberal Forum and Executive Director at the Institute for Politics and Society, and with Jana Brodani, Executive Director at the Czech Capital Market Association, Manager of the CFA Society Czech Republic and Board Member of the European Fund and Asset Management Association. Answers from both of these experienced women are summarised in the following part:

1. Why do you think there is so much inequality in the proportion of men and women in management board positions?

According to the respondents, women do not aspire as often to top positions and even when they are offered higher positions, they are hesitant and doubtful about their qualifications. Women tend to network less, which creates disadvantages in comparison with men, who create new opportunities while networking. Interviewees agreed that maternity leave is also a significant issue, creating a gap in the career path. Above all, the public is not well informed about the problem of inequality of women and men in the workplace.

2. What steps/actions can we take to increase the proportion of women in those positions?

Respondents suggested open public discussion with qualified experts, so the general public could be involved in the discussion and learn more about the current situation. Reducing gender inequality in traditionally perceived male and female professions would encourage women to establish themselves in those positions. Another suggestion is to organise more women-focused events with the possibility of networking. Both interviewees agreed on suggestions such as providing babysitters as a professional benefit, home office opportunities, flexible working hours and better childcare, one that would provide children with quality time and education, all the while encouraging women to get back to their career paths. Besides that, shared parental leave should definitely become the standard.

3. What motivated/hindered you during your journey to your current position?

According to the respondents, their biggest motivation was to have work that has meaning and potential, is

⁸ Accessible at: <https://cfapoland.org/application/media/images/Arts/CFA-SP-Women-on-boards-and-company-performance-report.pdf>.

creative and offers further career development. Women themselves should demonstrate the will to develop and move forward.

4. What qualities should a woman have in a higher position in order to be a role model?

According to the interviewees, patience, mental calm and persistence are very important. Women also need to be authentic, sincere and have the courage to face challenges, work hard and not be afraid of the problems that arise on the path to higher positions. Setting smaller and reachable goals is a useful tool for achieving greater success.

5. What advice would you give the younger generation of women on achieving success in the workplace?

Not to underestimate themselves, but also not to overestimate themselves – to have the right balance. To have courage, while remaining humble and respectful. Focus on your own needs, network and study, work hard, but gives you rewards for the hard work. Last but not least, surround yourself with people who know how to encourage you.

Why is management board diversity important?

After covering the quantitative and qualitative parts of this research, to get to the bottom of this issue we should consider why gender inclusion in the boardrooms is of such vital importance and why it is worthwhile to increase overall boardroom diversity.

It is well known that the success of the company and its survival on the market depends directly on the decisions of management boards, so making decision-making process more dynamic has been a subject of interest for many companies and research entities for a long time. One of the key factors influencing the performance of management boards are the people who are part of them. More and more entities have realised that a diverse corporate environment has a real impact on the financial results of companies.

To achieve higher competitiveness, the management board must be composed of people who have a good understanding of the global environment, but also local political and economic conditions, nuances of various industries, their financial and legal aspects, as well as technologies that revolutionise them. For this reason, board members must represent a fairly wide range of knowledge, competences and perspectives, and this is only possible in a non-homogeneous environment. If the board is made up of people who think similarly, what is the difference whether decisions are made by one person or ten people? Teams with diverse life experiences tend to come up with more creative solutions tailored to the needs of the whole society, and this becomes the key to staying in business. Aspects that differentiate the corporate environment include gender, age, race, nationality, lifestyle, culture, religion, education, tenure, experience, and many other factors that make us unique individuals⁹.

⁹ Shital Jhunjunwala, Ram Kumar Mishra, Diversity and the Effective Corporate Board, O'Reilly - 2021.

Talent acquisition

Greater use of the potential of women is one of the simplest solutions to the problem of the lack of talent in industrial areas requiring high qualifications, such as IT, including technologies related to the dynamically developing field of Artificial Intelligence. Women on boards understand well the problems of women in lower positions, because they had to follow the same path. Therefore, they are able to create a more female-friendly working environment. It can also encourage women looking for a job. If there is a woman on the board, it can be assumed that there is no discrimination on the lower levels either, which facilitates the talent acquisition process by the company.

Workplace culture and reputation

Nowadays, despite many actions that have already been taken, corporations still struggle with problems such as wage inequality, discrimination against women and sexual harassment. Cases like this strongly affect public trust and brand reputation, so companies should act on these fronts in their own interests. Having a woman on the board emphasises the company's values, significantly improves its image and is probably the most obvious way to create a woman-friendly work environment. Furthermore, it gives lower-level female employees a role model that can inspire them and increase their ambitions in their own careers.

Management in ethnically diverse countries

According to the research published in the Harvard Business Review¹⁰, women achieve better results than men when managing companies located in countries with a varied demographic profile. This study shows that a country's racial/ethnic diversity is negatively correlated with overall economic growth due to problems with internal racist conflict. The aim of the study was to prove that the solution to this issue could be to increase the involvement of women in management structures. Macroeconomic factors, country differentiation, gender of the leader and economic performance outcomes using a standard time-series approach were analysed. According to these studies, women are better at managing in ethnically/racially diverse countries than men. When led by women, they had an average 5.4% of GDP growth per year, and only 1.1% per year with male leaders. This statistic suggests that women may be better at unlocking the potential of a diverse community than men.

Getting investors

Having women on the board can be beneficial in gaining investor confidence. Companies such as Amazon (Europe) or CalPERS (USA) take gender diversity into account in the process of selecting appropriate business partners¹¹. Some of the investors even organise themselves into groups to put pressure on companies. One of the most popular initiatives is the 30% Club, which seeks to increase the representation of women on the

10 Susan Perkins, Katherine W. Phillips, Are Women Better at Leading Diverse Countries Than Men? Harvard Business Review, February 7, 2019.

11 Shital Jhunjunwala, Ram Kumar Mishra, op. cit.

boards of global companies in local branches around the world. The club was founded in 2010 in Great Britain and is not an advocate of imposing compulsory quantitative criteria on the composition of the board, but rather voluntary affiliation in order to achieve permanent change¹².

Summary & recommendations

The aim of the report is to recapitulate gender inclusion in the largest enterprises of countries in the V4+ region, with the main focus on the top twenty companies by country, based on the national stock exchange indexes. We observed the management bodies of some of the companies concerned and sought to explore the proportion of women and men in strategic governing bodies as well as to track the changes in gender ratio over the past five years. However, the data shed light on the problem of gender inequality, which has become an increasingly important issue in recent times, what justifies the relevance of our research. The examples outlined in the report prove that regardless of country and industry the gender gap in corporate boards within the V4+ region is unequivocal.

The research is not only a factual description of the situation but also an incentive to enhance discourse on the subject. It seems that changes have already begun and are reflected in certain steps and measures such as national programmes and strategies to address the gender gap. These are significant steps, but bottom-up initiatives are equally important. Therefore, the report includes interviews with experienced women in business, in order to serve as inspiration for improving the current situation in workplaces.

In conclusion, the report aims to emphasise the importance of the topic of gender inclusion, briefly delineate the current situation of gender inequality in the managerial bodies of enterprises based on quantitative and qualitative research, and promote the trend of gender inclusion, which is receiving increasing attention thereby proliferating solutions and significant results in making it a reality.

12 Linda-Eling Lee, Ric Marshall, Damion Rallis, Matt Moscardi, Women on Boards - Global Trends in Gender Diversity on Corporate Boards, MSCI, November 2015.

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Chapter 6

WOMEN AS START-UP FOUNDERS

Throughout history, societies around the world have benefitted from the work of women innovators in all areas of daily lives and business. Despite countless examples of women who have proven their innovative and creative abilities and despite the fact that the more diverse a team is the better its long-term benefits and productivity are, the gender gap in the innovation and start-up sector is large enough to give the impression of wasted intellectual potential. What can be observed today is not only significant gender-based differences in benefiting from intellectual property rights protection (only around 30% of registrations are submitted by women) but also in accessing funding opportunities for ideas within the venture capital communities. In 2020, female founders in the CEE region received just 1% of funding, which might lead to the erroneous conclusion that the market is not something women are interested in. Overall, global data from Crunchbase only confirm the gender-biased approach, with total funding to women-led start-ups falling and the proportion of dollars to female-only founders declining to 2.3 percent, compared to 2.8 percent in 2019.

Commercialisation of various products and concepts has paved the way not only to gender equity but also to the development of modern society.

Historically, most famous inventions and commercialisation of products (predecessors of today's "start-ups") were created or carried out largely by men, because women were denied even the right to a primary school education, and their work credited to a male member of their household. Despite these difficulties, women showed their entrepreneurial skills and developed many concepts in segments of the market where they were granted access, mostly in fashion (corset-free clothes, underwire bras) and household appliances (the dishwasher, the first concept for gas-fuelled central heating, correction fluid paper and technical aspects of the refrigerator). Women contributed to the discovery of DNA sequencing and related technology, to the development of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technologies, not to mention Maria Skłodowska-Curie's impact on science. Innovative solutions, created by both genders, resulted not only in greater female empowerment but also in increased economic, political, and civil rights. Commercialisation of various concepts helped to facilitate gender equality and improved access to the labour and educational market mostly by enabling women to fulfil their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers at the same time. The fertility control provided by commercialisation of oral contraceptive pills made family planning, and therefore a business career, possible. Technological development of the household appliances reduced the time needed to complete household tasks, enabling women to use that time for personal development and fulfilment of other personal needs.

Nevertheless, women remain significantly underrepresented in start-up communities, with an average EU ratio of 15.6% of start-ups having a female founder.

The positive impact of product commercialisation on women's road to equality cannot be denied and the importance of supporting female entrepreneurship seems to be a crucial step in further counteracting gender bias. However, women remain significantly underrepresented in start-up communities, even compared to the early period of production automatisisation and industrial revolution. On average, only 15.6% of start-ups in the EU have female founders, even though diversity in start-up management teams has a positive effect on long-term profit generation. Interestingly, the percentage of female founders in Central Europe is in most cases higher than the EU average, with figures of 23.9%, 23.7%, 23.5% and 9.3% reported for Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, respectively. At the same time, the traditional measure of inequality – the pay gap – is trending in the opposite direction and equal to 22.5%, 19.6%, 14% and 7.7% for the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, respectively, which raises questions regarding why these differences exist. In all these countries, start-up ecosystems were established relatively recently and have been developing for only a few years. Most of the support for their development was provided by EU-backed investment schemes.

The division between business sectors “for women” and “for men” is visible in the start-up world, with education, fashion and lifestyle segments offering the greatest chance for women to succeed as start-up founders.

Most Polish, Slovakian and Hungarian start-ups are in the IT field (both software development and SaaS-based solutions). Interestingly, Hungary and Slovakia are leading the European ranking in terms of total number of educational start-ups, with 15.8% and 11.8% (compared to the EU average of 3.5%). This level of participation in the start-up ecosystems seems similar to the beginning of gender equality movements, when women were allowed to act mostly within the fields that were traditionally associated with their gender. Education is one of the first business areas where women were granted professional access, not only as teachers for their own offspring but also in some primary schools. Being generally less high-tech and disruptive, education and lifestyle in general still is considered “not for men” but rather “for women”, especially in non-tech or business areas. It is thus gender-biased, which is one of the reasons why it is still tough for women to succeed in founding start-ups and securing financial support despite statistically being better educated.

Gender bias and the law of first impression are most frequently identified as major contributors to the underrepresentation of women in start-ups.

It is therefore not surprising that both first impression and gender bias are named as the major barriers for women in the start-up world. Female founders face different questions, mostly about investment risks, while male founders are asked about potential rewards. As the impression made during a pitching session can have a major impact on the decision-making process, women seem “weaker”, “not experienced enough”, “not tech

enough”, and thus they are disqualified. Most studies show that women are treated differently when asking for funding, especially within fields considered to be “dominated by men”. Historically, female start-up founders leave tech-based start-ups only to reappear within more consumer-centric industries. Crunchbase Unicorn Board seems to confirm the tendency, as unicorns’ lists are mostly filled by women-for-women start-ups or in female-dominated industries such as: Everlywell (healthcare testing), Rent the Runway (luxury fashion rental company), Guild Education or Coursera (education-based). The CEE region also has its own so-called “pink portfolio” scheme, with Polish Sidly, Szumisie and Glov businesses considered to be top female start-ups. It is also home to a few success stories of women entering male-dominated industries, such as Veronika Pistyur from Hungary, who began her start-up career in a non-profit venture of one of the most successful local start-ups founded by P. Prezi and ended up as a venture partner of the VC fund, or Olga Malinkiewicz, whose new energy start-up Saule CTO, co-founded with male founders, is a high-tech start-up of note.

The lack of industry support is also keeping the number of women within the sector low.

The second reason named for insufficient participation of women within the start-up industry is the lack of a support system in terms of mentors or support networks. The overall data from the CEE region show that VC firms with women partners are more than twice as likely to invest in women-led enterprises, and more than three times more likely to invest in enterprises with female CEOs. Lack of strong support in male-dominated industries becomes a strong barrier, which can be solved by not being shy in contacting male counterparts, asking for support from women’s networks (both national and regional), or seeking another co-founder based on business development and funding needs. Similar to the impact of diversity on overall performance, having both female and male mentors also brings positive benefits. Support from male mentors could also be a key factor in obtaining funding for more tech-focused start-ups instead of so-called girly-lifestyle start-ups, in which women are seen as the public face, rather than the core technical expert. Traditional perceptions of femininity, especially in the CEE region, do not help, as many more expectations are put on women in terms of delivering results and displaying character traits that are valued in men, but not so widely accepted when exhibited by women.

Lack of self-confidence is correlated with lower funding.

Reluctance to ask for mentoring from different sources might have also another negative impact on the ability of women to obtain funding. Shying away from utilising social networks or timidity when pitching to investors jeopardises not only relationship-building possibilities but also capital-raising opportunities. As with salary negotiations, female founders not only tend to ask for less than men, leaving less room for further negotiations, but also receive a lower percentage of the amount they request. This discrepancy was featured in Columbia Business School research, showing that each risk-related question women were asked equated to about \$3.8 million less in funding. This sobering statistic, combined with gender bias, and more robust questioning of female founders explains the huge funding discrepancy.

Structural changes within the educational system and women-to-women investment schemes seem crucial for a more gender-balanced approach to start-ups and start-up investments.

With gender imbalances in start-up funding worsening during the COVID pandemic, it is even more important for women-led start-ups and venture capital funds to work together in creating solutions for a changing world in the form of unparalleled services and products. Each change opens up new opportunities and gender equality financing is one of the main future pillars of international financing organisations such as the EIB, EBRD, and WHO.

The key points to securing greater access by women to funding lies in creating a flow of deals and funnel of opportunities geared towards female entrepreneurship. The educational system must drive this change, as some gender-biased approaches start in schools. Men interrupting women or taking credit for their ideas prevents women from developing the negotiation skills they need in male-dominated industries. Teaching materials and case studies showing mostly male-dominated stories do not provide positive examples of career planning activities for women. Also, harsher, more direct feedback towards male students leads to better negotiation skills and greater self-awareness in later professional life. Building a culture that fosters tech competences among women must also start with early education.

Gender inequality can be also reduced by organising dedicated female-only start-ups calls, events and accelerator programmes, giving access to more funding in a gender-biased environment. “World’s Women’s Entrepreneurship Day”, organised in 2018 in Budapest, garnered enormous interest, demonstrating the necessary for women-only rounds, involving more women in start-up ecosystems funding and financing, and thereby increasing the number of women actively investing in other women’s ideas. Women-only VC funds, accelerator programmes and organisations are exceedingly rare, but they do exist, with Female Founders in Vienna taking the lead and Women in VC co-founded by Polish VC partner Kinga Stanisławska constantly supporting a more equal approach to gender within the entire regional start-up ecosystem.

Although there is a long way to go until equal access to funding opportunities is guaranteed, advocating for equality and gender balance is important for everyone, all businesses and society. In the end, we all benefit from women’s inventions and impact on the future.

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Chapter 7

ADDRESSING PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT

Introduction to the concept of burnout

Although the term “burnout” was first coined half a century ago, there is still no universally accepted definition that can be applied to every case of suspected burnout and, consequently, no standard for diagnosis. Over many years of research, separating burnout from other health disorders has proven to be rather difficult on numerous occasions, while potential causal factors are still the subject of much controversy.¹ It is crucial this be mentioned as a preface to any conversation or debate regarding burnout or its impact on the overall well-being and productivity of employees. Otherwise, professionals, particularly those tasked with preventing or intervening in cases of burnout, might be biased in favour of a specific burnout model, which will impact the strategies used in addressing the issue. It might even cause harm if applied as a general rule, rather than a customised plan made in cooperation with the individuals who are actively seeking help or are perceived by their co-workers as in need of assistance in addressing a potential state of burnout.

Even without a universal definition, burnout syndrome is still visible in the form of symptoms such as exhaustion, cynicism and a declining sense of professional capability, which are commonly used to define burnout. It is also widely accepted that chronic and unresolved stress is at the core of this problem.²

Recognition of burnout as a major and pressing issue in modern working environments is largely due to widespread media interest and coverage. This has undoubtedly helped working professionals around the world (both employers and employees) to be more aware of the occurrence and/or prevalence of burnout in their workplaces, among their colleagues and in themselves. Unfortunately, some aspects of burnout or the syndrome as a whole are regarded by some as a trend, something that is “in fashion”, a “buzzword” whose very real health impact then goes untreated.

Nevertheless, burnout remains a very real issue, and although it was first observed predominantly in caring and social professions (e.g. among social workers, nurses, teachers, doctors), the syndrome is not limited to a specific sector, set of circumstances, sex or age group. The occurrence of burnout syndrome has also been reported among laboratory workers, therapists, police and prison officers, stewardesses, managers, as well as

1 Klieser E, Schar V. Burnout-Syndrom. MMP 1996; 19:17-20.

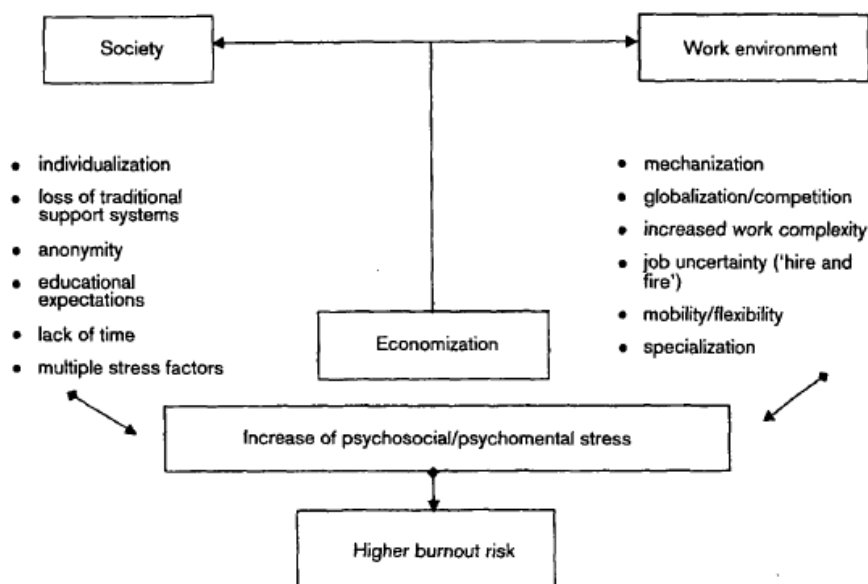
2 Weber A, Jaekel-Reinhard A, Burnout Syndrome: A Disease of Modern Societies? Occupational Medicine, Volume 50, Issue 7, September 2000, pp. 512–517

housewives, students and the unemployed.³ These facts are important, not only in and of themselves, but also because they have been particularly meaningful in sparking interest in recent years within the sociological and psychological communities in identifying the professions, and therefore employees, whose burnout levels have so far gone unassessed. Given greater interest in the subject, the inclusion of a variety of fields or professions in the research will help to generate more personalised and applicable plans for awareness-raising or intervention in as many sectors as possible.

In spite of general consensus within the scientific community that burnout is not more prevalent within certain social groups, ongoing research is placing greater emphasis on cultural and social contexts when it comes to working women, given that they already face discrimination both on the labour market and more generally within society, meaning they must often overcome more obstacles and challenges than men. This approach, however, not only involves creating strategies based on gender-related differences in job opportunities, expectations, or employee treatment, but also proposes looking into the cultural context of, for example, national or ethnic identity and possible shared mentality, with the goal of ensuring that a lack of inclusivity in the workplace is not the real culprit behind the everyday struggles employees are facing.

The two figures below feature the processes that “foster” burnout from a multifaceted perspective, making it easier to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon and consider the presence or absence of certain aspects in the occurrence of burnout syndrome, based on the personal experience of an employee.

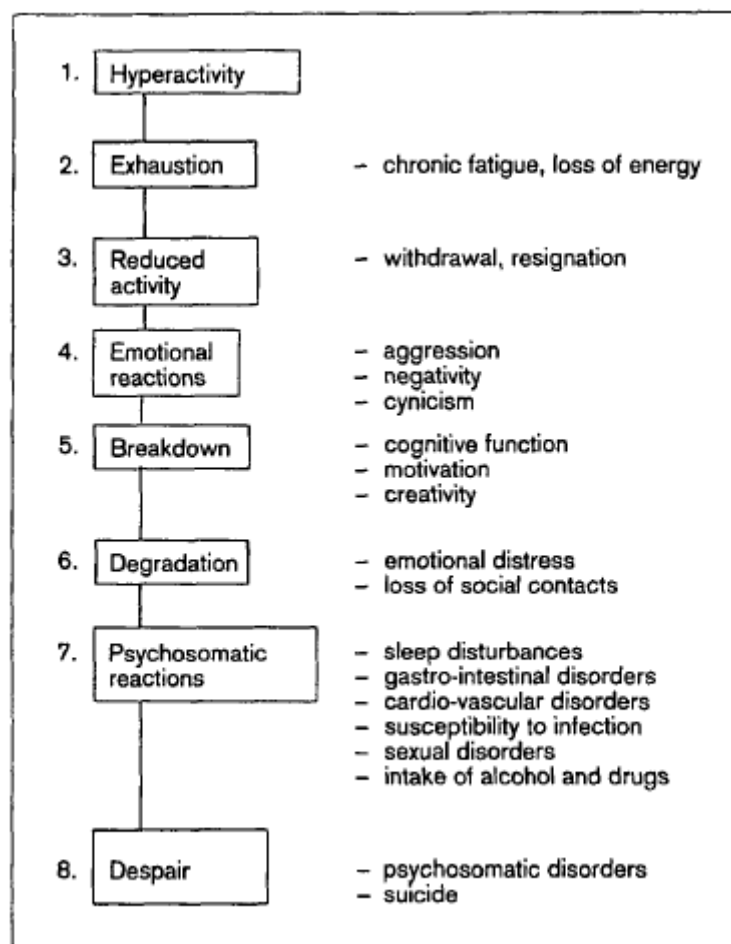
Figure 1. Burnout: an interaction between society and the working environment.⁴



3 Maslach C, Jackson SE. The measurement of experienced burnout. J Occup Behav 1981; 2: 99-113.

4 Weber A, Jaekel-Reinhard A, Burnout Syndrome: A Disease of Modern Societies? Occupational Medicine, Volume 50, Issue 7, September 2000, pp. 512-517

Figure 2. Burnout: a dynamic process (“burnout cascade”).⁵



What causes burnout?

Since burnout is “a gradual and complex process that is not marked by sudden onset but rather by slow and gradual change in functioning, having no beginning and ending point but varying levels or degrees”⁶, it is impossible to pinpoint the precise causes. Because there is usually no single culprit and health issues of this kind are the result of a complex interaction of various factors, it is recommended that both the affected individual as well as other people in the workplace (their team members, other colleagues, managers, the employer) assess the issue. Too often, all the responsibility is placed on the affected individual, usually because the manifestation of burnout (as shown in Figure 2) seems very personal. The individual is expected to “sort it out”, “get it together” or “do better”. In fact, this is virtually impossible, since everything that happens in the workplace will have an immediate effect on the individual, their performance and well-being. If no changes are made in the external environment, everything an individual could do to improve the situation might be in vain and inflict irreversible harm. Additionally, many surveys suggest that the strongest predictor of burnout is the way work is delegated to employees. One such survey, conducted by Gallup⁷, shows that the top five reasons for

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Schaufeli W, Maslach C, & Marek T, Professional burnout: Recent developments, 1993

⁷ Wigert B, Agrawal S, Employee Burnout, Part 1: The 5 Main Causes, 12 July 2018; Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237059/employee-burnout-part-main-causes.aspx>

burnout are unfair treatment at work, unmanageable workload, lack of role clarity, lack of communication and support from the manager, and unreasonable time pressure.

How to help employees in preventing or recovering from burnout

Simply recognising the signs and symptoms, for most employers and members of management teams, will unfortunately not be enough to take action. It is highly recommended to gain a better understanding of the issue first and come to terms with the consequences for the whole team if the problem is not properly addressed. Firstly, understand that burnout is more likely when employees:⁸ expect too much of themselves, don't feel that what they are doing is good enough, feel inadequate or incompetent, feel unappreciated for their efforts, have unreasonable demands placed upon them, are in roles that are not a good fit.

Burnout may result in a number of negative outcomes if not addressed, some of which will impact the employer in terms of workflow, work atmosphere or overall company success. Some of these include:⁹ poor physical health, reduced job satisfaction, decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, increased risk of accidents, poor workplace morale, communication breakdown and increased turnover.

As previously stated, burnout is a continuous struggle for most sufferers, so the best way to demonstrate true care for employee well-being, as well as prevent additional issues within the workplace, is prevention. Some of the most useful strategies in achieving this are:¹⁰

- Providing clear expectations for all employees and making sure that each employee understands these expectations;
- Making sure employees have the necessary resources and skills to meet expectations (if not, consider investing in upskilling, if a good outcome from such training is foreseeable);
- Enforcing reasonable work hours (with careful consideration of special exceptions when overtime work might be necessary);
- Encouraging support and respect within and between teams through various activities (not only by organising one-time team-building activities, but by investing time in building quality relationships);
- Strongly encouraging taking breaks away from the work environment;
- Considering if leadership approaches have fostered a higher risk of burnout.

“Overachievers” are at a particularly high risk of burnout, considering how they approach work and related obligations. “These are individuals who often respond to work stress by taking on more work, which can be further exacerbated by a workplace that consistently looks to top performers to take on most of the toughest projects as well as additional tasks such as mentoring lower performers.”¹¹ Levelling these expectations out involves avoiding situations where an overachiever is always required to compensate for others, giving them

8 Mathieu F, Baynton MA, & Workplace Strategies, *Burnout response for leaders*, 1 January 2016; Retrieved from <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/burnout-response-for-leaders>

9 Ibidem.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibidem.

choices in regards to tasks (rather than always assuming they want to work on the most demanding projects), and reminding them that in a healthy working environment it is perfectly acceptable to say “no” and explain why they would rather not take on a certain task.¹²

If an individual is already experiencing burnout and has not received adequate support, leaders should still make an effort to assist in the recovery process as much as possible, that is, as much as the affected individual is genuinely comfortable with their involvement. The most important thing is to make sure that the team understands and shares the values and expectations within the workplace. Supporting recovery at work can start by asking the employee how best to recognise their successes. This could include “immediate and personal praise, opportunities for growth and development, or public recognition”.¹³

Although these suggestions have been proven to work in helping women recognise, accept and systematically address the issue of burnout, the global pandemic has not only brought major changes to many workplaces in terms of structure and task delegation, but as a large number of women have experienced, it has put unbearable pressure on women in particular, intensifying existing worries and struggles, disrupting work-life balance and workplace safety. These constant fears include anxiety about one’s own health, the health of co-workers and family members. Women feel an obligation to put in extra work to maintain a pace that ensures their work is sustainable and profitable, and, among many other problems and worries, a constant thought for many women in 2020 and 2021 has been “Am I still needed? Will I be laid off?”

All these struggles and concerns seem normal for any working woman to have on her mind, but even without the added stresses of the pandemic, the pressure on women to perform at their best can take an enormous toll on women’s sense of self-worth. Regardless of the financial/economic situation, the constant anxiety of being on the front lines, combined with the added responsibility of keeping up with all the latest information and, more often than not, making sure family members, friends and colleagues are kept in the loop, in addition to regular work-related tasks and obligations, is very much the current reality of working women. Moreover, not only present stresses are weighing on women’s minds, but those that await them in the future post-pandemic world are adding to the general anxiety.

While the resilience of professional women as workers is usually a point in their favour, it is worrying to think that women may be more or less expected to “rebuild the economy” or certain job markets, despite their many skills and capabilities. More precisely, a wave of optimism and positivity about job market revival may put too much pressure on women to either continue right where they (or the company or sector) have left off or involve aggressive encouragement to chase new job opportunities and not “waste their time” with the opportunities given to them. Although these situations seem like the ideal solutions for getting back to the “old normal”, they will also likely expose women to textbook burnout from excessive optimism or overworking themselves in attempting to succeed in “the mission” to fix everything – from the company’s goals to their own positions within that system.

12 Ibidem.

13 Ibidem.

Another, much more favourable way to proceed is to reclaim one's position in the company or the job market by being aware of your own competences and limitations, without the pressure of surpassing your “pre-pandemic self”. In practice, this scenario allows working women to accept that no market trends, in the traditional sense of the word, are an overriding priority at the moment, especially given the fact that the pandemic does not seem to be dying down anytime soon. This means there will also be a prolonged delay before worries about the future will need to be confronted, and many working women will not be able to afford the “luxury” of thinking further into the future, while their present continues to be rather uncertain. Moreover, this approach will still allow them to explore opportunities through the channels they are most familiar and comfortable with (using certain technological assets, for example, mobile apps, and in the case of the burnout phenomenon, apps which provide assistance with handling anxiety attacks, or those that help to practice mindfulness, for example).

As this article has already suggested, an individual experiencing burnout symptoms should definitely receive significant assistance from the employer, whose duty should be to prevent burnout from occurring in the first place. But since most companies, big or small, are not accustomed to taking the mental health of their employees into consideration, it is likely that women will need resources for intervention and recovery, rather than prevention and level one awareness-raising.

Summary

Burnout has rapidly become a global concern and presents a major challenge to employee health and the functioning of their organisations. Unsatisfactory work may lead to long-term emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a declining sense of professional capability. Work-related stress can affect employee satisfaction, work productivity, mental and physical health, as well as increase rates of absenteeism and costs for the organisation.^[6] As discussed throughout this chapter, the complex nature of burnout, both in terms of its origin and manifestations, indicates that the safest approach, for employees at risk as well as their management and employers, is to invest in prevention and work actively to raise awareness within the workplace, industry, and, potentially, across entire business sectors.

There is currently a gap in strategies for dealing adequately with the potential post-pandemic scenario because job market participants lack distance from certain events, which would otherwise help assess the consequences and the real, objective state of the market. As a result, it is likely that, unfortunately, there might be insufficient external support for working women facing burnout. However, even in that case, the individual still has the opportunity to seek self-and professional help (from psychologists or HR practitioners), which will hopefully provide significant support while starting the journey of personal and professional recovery.

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Chapter 8

BURNOUT (RESEARCH ON BURNOUT IN WORKING WOMEN FROM POLAND, CZECHIA AND HUNGARY)

1. Introduction

Feeling negative or numb about work you once loved, alienated from people around you, tired and emotionally exhausted all the time, or worse, struggling with headaches or intestinal issues.¹ What do they have in common? These are all symptoms of **burnout**.

According to the definition provided by the WHO, “*burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed*”.² It is characterised by three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished professional efficacy.³

Even though burnout is not classified as a mental condition⁴, it has serious mental and physical effects. Since it was *first coined in 1974 by Herbert Freudenberger*⁵, burnout has become a popular research topic. However, only a few studies have explored the emergence of burnout by age group or gender in specific regions of the world.

One of them was carried out in 2008 and explored the relationship between age and burnout by sex in three age groups, including the adult working population in Finland. The researchers found that the probability of

1 Maslach C, Leiter MP. Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry*. 2016; 15(2):103–111. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002%2Fwps.20311>

2 Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”: International Classification of Diseases, World Health Organization, 2018/05/28, <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases#>

3 W.B. Schaufeli, M.P. Leiter, C. Maslach, S.E. Jackson Maslach, Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS) C. Maslach, S.E. Jackson, M.P. Leiter (Eds.), Maslach burnout inventory manual (3rd ed.), Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto (CA), 1996, p. 19-32

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5 Scott, E., Burnout Symptoms and Treatment, 2020/03/20, <https://www.verywellmind.com/stress-and-burnout-symptoms-and-causes-3144516#>

burnout among young female workers was low, but high among ageing female workers.⁶ Another study was conducted in Canada in 2018 and showed that among 2,073 Canadian workers women between the ages of 20-35 and over age 55 experienced the highest level of burnout.⁷ With the current research, our aim is to examine the Central European region and analyse the situation of women from the V4 countries in terms of the level of burnout.

2. Burnout Assessment Tool

The initial symptoms of burnout symptoms are easily overlooked and burnout level is not something a person can self-assess. Clinical diagnosis is helpful on an individual level but proves impossible when working on a large sample. Most importantly, quantifying the burnout level requires using a validated tool.

The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) was created to measure and estimate the level of burnout symptoms. It is not enough to diagnose burnout, but provides a scientifically validated method of calculating a burnout score which can then be compared with a scale⁸.

The BAT questionnaire consists of 23 items reflecting core symptoms (exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment) and 10 items regarding secondary symptoms (psychological distress, psychosomatic complaints). Every item can be answered on a 5-point scale: 1 “never”, 2 “rarely”, 3 “sometimes”, 4 “often”, and 5 “always”. The total score is an average of all BAT items and ranges between 1 and 5. Interpretation of the score is performed through clinical cut-off values, which provide a comparison between the observed BAT score and the BAT scores of patients who have been clinically diagnosed as suffering from burnout. Therefore, this method plays an important role in assessing individual burnout. Three types of scores are distinguished: green (no risk of burnout), orange (at risk of burnout) or red (very high risk of burnout). Scores of core symptoms and secondary symptoms are calculated separately.

	Core symptoms	Secondary symptoms
Green	1.00 – 2.58	1.00 – 2.84
Orange	2.59 – 3.01	2.85 – 3.34
Red	3.02 – 5.00	3.35 – 5.00

6 Ahola, K., Honkonen, T., Virtanen, M., Aromaa, A. & Lonnqvist, J., Burnout in Relation to Age in the Adult Working Population, *Journal of occupational health*, Volume 50, 2008/07/01, p. 363 <https://doi.org/10.1539/joh.M8002>

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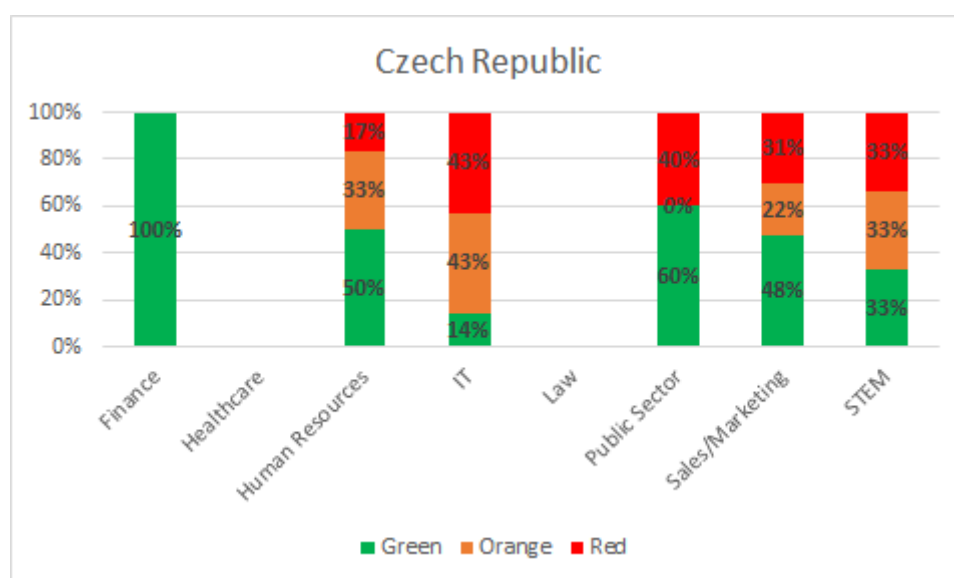
3. Burnout Assessment Survey

We conducted surveys in three V4 countries (with 101 respondents in Poland, 81 in Hungary and 124 in the Czech Republic) among women aged 18-35. Respondents were categorised into eight job sectors: IT, Healthcare, Finance, STEM, Law, Human Resources, Public Sector, Sales/Marketing.

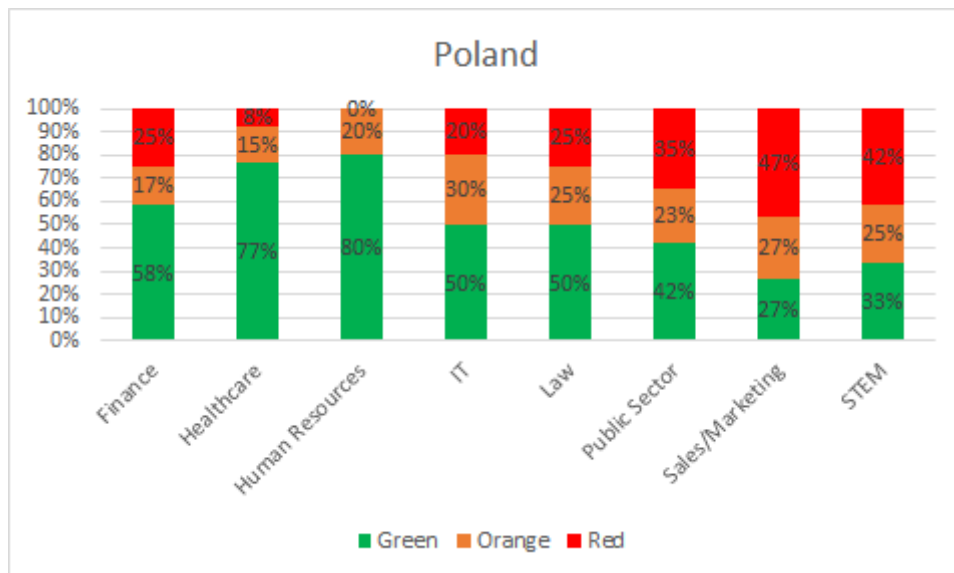
COUNTRY	Respondents	Size of group by age	Main sector of activity	Avg. number of kids
POLAND	101	24-26 (31.7%)	STEM (25.7%)	0.12
CZECH REP	124	24-26 (45.7%)	Sales & Marketing (71%)	0.17
HUNGARY	81	24-26 (45.7%)	Sales & Marketing (31%)	0.06

Participants were also asked about their length of employment and number of children, as well as the impact of the Covid pandemic on their level of work-related stress. Then we asked their opinion about the main factors contributing to stress at work and conducted a thorough BAT burnout analysis.

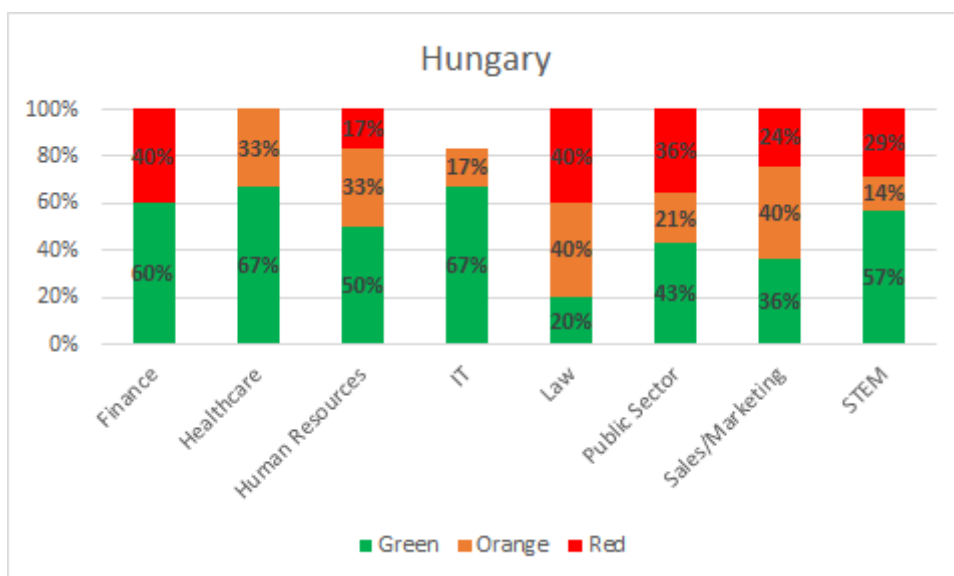
3.1. Assessment of occupational burnout in a given labour sector



The Czech Republic was the only country where we did not manage to reach women from all sectors. Human Resources was identified as a sector with the most respondents having almost no risk of burnout. On the contrary, in the IT sector, only 14% women reported no risk of burnout, with the other 86% having medium or high risk of burnout. Overall, 48% of working women in Czech Republic reported no risk of burnout, 28% were identified as at risk of burnout and 23% as at high risk of burnout.

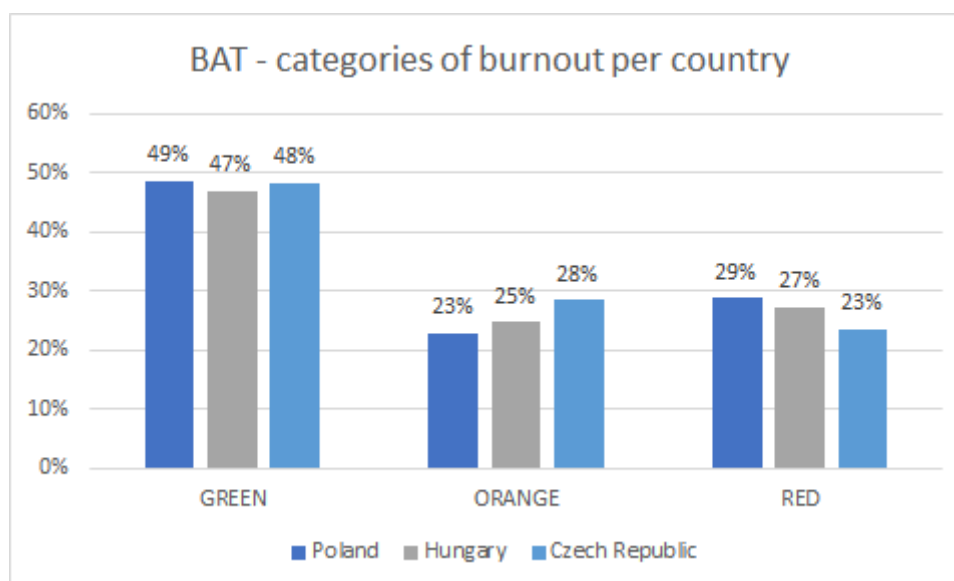


In Poland, 49% of the respondents were not at risk of burnout, 23% were at risk of burnout and 29% at a high risk of burnout. Sectors with the lowest risk of burnout were Healthcare, Human resources and Finance. Sectors with the highest reported risk of burnout were Sales/Marketing, where 74% of women showed symptoms of medium or high risk of burnout, and STEM with 68% of women at risk of burnout.



27% of Hungarian participants showed symptoms of a high risk of burnout and 25% were identified as at risk of burnout. 47% showed no risk of burnout. Based on the responses, the sectors with the smallest risk of burnout were Healthcare and IT, while the risk of burnout was disproportionately higher in women working in the Law field. Only 20% were characterised with no risk of burnout. The rest of the participants (80%) were equally divided between medium and high risk of burnout.

Overall, the results we have obtained show that even up to 50% of women in Central Europe might be at risk of burnout, regardless of job sector. A high risk of burnout was reported by 28% of women, revealing the enormous scale of this problem, especially given the young age of the women surveyed.



		18-23	24-26	27-30	31-35
Poland	Green	46%	56%	41%	50%
Poland	Orange	29%	22%	30%	0%
Poland	Red	25%	22%	30%	50%
Hungary	Green	62%	51%	32%	42%
Hungary	Orange	15%	27%	26%	25%
Hungary	Red	23%	22%	37%	33%
Czech Rep	Green	31%	76%	50%	33%

3.2. What are the main causes of stress at work?

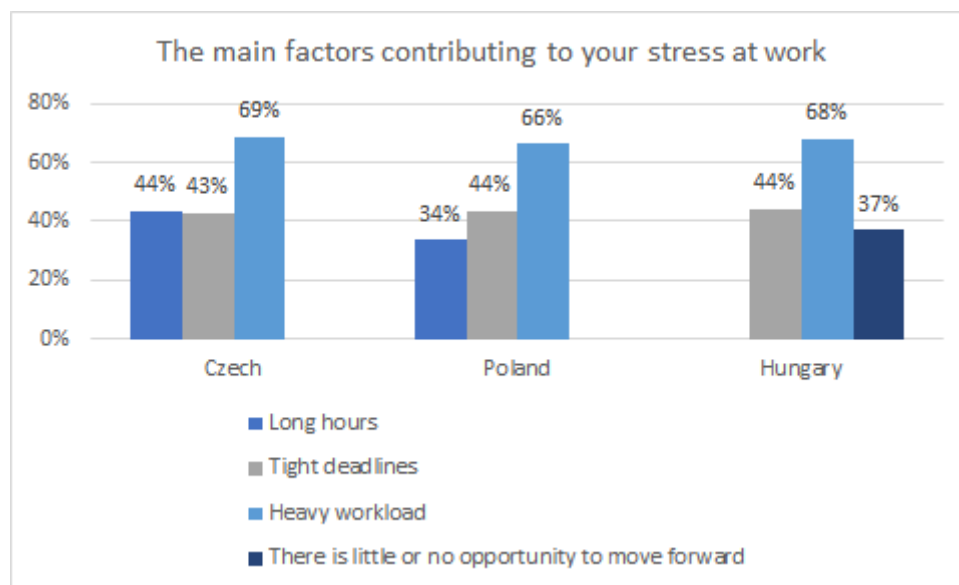
In the survey, we asked a multiple choice question with 17 different factors that can contribute to stress at work.

The factors included:

- long hours,
- heavy workload,
- changes within the organisation,
- tight deadlines,
- changes to duties,
- job insecurity,
- lack of autonomy,

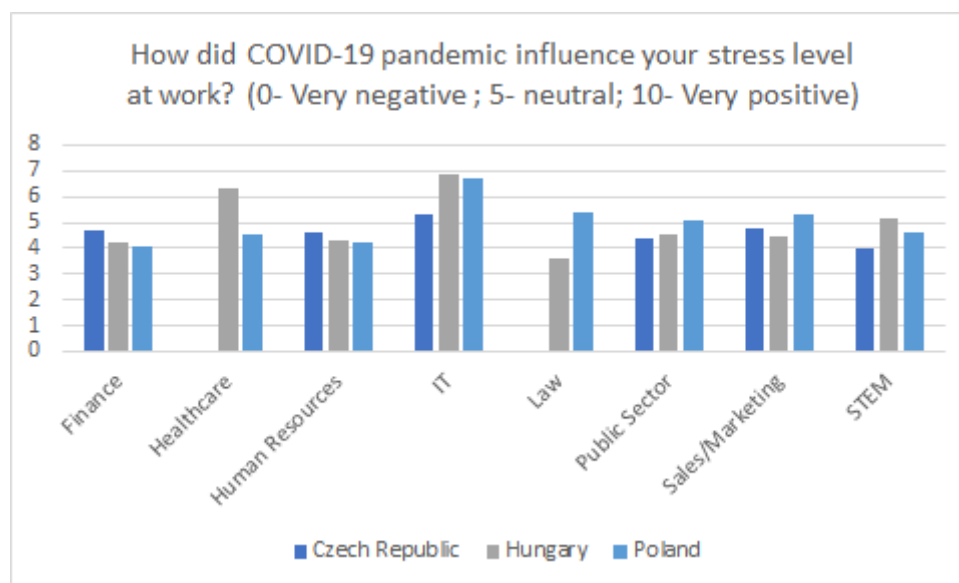
- boring work,
- insufficient skills for the job,
- over-supervision,
- inadequate working environment,
- lack of proper resources,
- lack of equipment,
- few promotional opportunities,
- harassment,
- discrimination,
- poor relationships with colleagues or bosses.

Each country provided almost identical answers when it came to the main factor contributing to stress at work.



The main factor was **heavy workload**, which was identified by almost 70% of respondents as the number one cause of burnout. The second most popular factor was tight deadlines, followed by long working hours.

Has Covid contributed to greater stress at work?



The Covid-19 pandemic decreased the stress level among IT employees in all three analysed countries. A positive impact was also observed among law practitioners in Poland and healthcare workers in Hungary. In other disciplines, the effect of Covid seems to be neutral or slightly below neutral. The numbers presented above are the average results of many positive, neutral and negative answers. This means that we cannot conclude that Covid and lockdowns have a minimal effect on stress level.

4. Conclusions

To properly analyse burnout and what causes it, we would need a bigger research group. However based on the analysed group, we can conclude that:

1. 50% of women in Central Europe might be at risk of burnout, regardless of job sector. We obtained consistent results for all 3 countries regarding the **main causes of stress at work**, which are **heavy workload and tight deadlines**. This is a helpful indicator for all managers and leaders who want to improve wellbeing in their teams when introducing initiatives to deal with those problems and create better workplaces.

2. It is necessary to raise awareness among all employees about burnout.

The BAT test shows that women in Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary complained most often of exhaustion. The second most frequently mentioned symptoms were secondary (psychological distress, psychosomatic complaints and depressed mood). This might suggest the **need to raise awareness among all employees** about burnout, its symptoms and implications. This would help employees to recognise when they are at a high risk of burnout or mental crisis more rapidly. Self-awareness alone is not enough – individuals also need knowledge and resources to get help. These two initiatives should be complementary.

3. Remote work seems to decrease stress levels in certain sectors.

The other interesting observation that needs to be investigated further is the impact of the Covid pandemic. Remote work seems to reduce stress levels among IT employees. For other disciplines, more data need to be collected to better understand the different effects the pandemic can have on a particular person, depending on different factors such as profession, economic status and family obligations.

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Chapter 9

WOMEN IN THE FINANCIAL SECTOR IN VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES – TRENDS, SIMILARITIES, AND THE FUTURE FORECAST

1. Introduction

The financial sector is one of the most competitive industries in Eastern and Central Europe. As a result of economic and political changes in the last 30 years, international banks and other financial institutions decided to open branches, as well as shared services hubs, in countries like Hungary or Poland. Along with the development of technology, artificial intelligence and FinTech, working in a bank is no longer associated only with customer service but provides multiple development opportunities in various areas (such as IT, business analytics, project management, etc.) for financial sector employees.

100 years ago, the banking industry in Poland was small compared to current employment figures. Moreover, it was dominated by men – nearly 70% percent of all employees were male (Leszczyńska, 2019: 93). Recent years have shown that now the banking industry is dominated by women (the proportion of women to men in banking has risen to 2:1). However, when those numbers are compared with female representation in managerial positions, a huge gap appears (Szkwarek, W: 2019).

My article focuses on finding similarities and trends in the banking sector between Visegrad Group countries. I used the methodology of reviewing and presenting literature using the V4 as the source of data. The main focus of all deliberations is the glass ceiling and why it is highly visible in financial services. Moreover, I would like to present trends that are similar in the chosen countries.

2. Trends on the banking market in V4 countries – similarities between Visegrad Group countries

Budapest and Warsaw have become centres for graduates who are seeking careers opportunities in international companies. Investment and corporate banks like Citi, Goldman Sachs or JP Morgan invest in finding the best talent in Eastern Europe. The same trend in finance is also highly visible in the Czech Republic. The structure of employment within the banking sector has changed greatly in favour of young women (aged 25-34) with tertiary education. This is related to the rapidly growing number of graduates in economically oriented disciplines over the last decade (Kališková, 2014). The percentage of women in management boards

is growing slowly, though the Czech Republic still lags behind the European average (Deloitte). This trend is visible not only in Central Europe but also worldwide. Less than 20% women are included in bank board seats (Barajas, P.; Cihak, M.; M N'Diaye., A.; Kyobe, A., Mitra, S.; Mooi, Y.; Sahay, R.; Yousefi, R, 2017: 8-11).

There might be multiple reasons which impact the status quo. Firstly, the timeline is a constraint. It will take years until those young women reach manager-level roles. There is also a limited number of women aged 35-50 who should be promoted. On the other hand, K. Kalíšková mentioned in her article about the Czech Republic that the financial sector offers double the average wage in addition to opportunities for promotion to senior positions, compared to other sectors.

Secondly, the history of all V4 countries is complementary. Female leadership is a trend that is changing the mind-set that women belong in the home instead of the workplace (Helios, J.; Jedlečka, W. 2016: 50-61). Nonetheless, women consider traditional roles as a major constraint on promotion, specifically: how male colleagues perceive female peers, and barriers for promotion created by the need for time management and prioritisation.

Fortunately, the trend is changing in conjunction with campaigns encouraging female high school students to attend universities, with an emphasis on IT, engineering and economics.

3. Good practices and future forecast

The previously mentioned report prepared by Antal includes guidelines for improvement of the situation of women in the financial sector in Poland and for increasing their security and motivation to apply for higher positions (Antal Report, 2021: 10). Among the guidelines is fostering work-life balance, which employees also highlight as necessary. Managerial roles are associated with long working hours, multiple tasks and related responsibilities. This is discouraging for women who want to achieve goals in their private lives (being a mother, attending university, etc.).

What is more, in the mentioned report, the majority of women (over 59%) state that their gender has an influence on promotion within the company. A good practice implemented by Citi Shared Service in Poland and Hungary was the creation of an internal Citi Women's Network, which supports women in improving their hard and soft skills. This is also a great platform for networking with senior-level managers and peers. Citibank is also a great example of a bank that strongly concentrates on corporate social responsibility. Representation of women and men is nearly 50:50. In addition, Citi also promotes ethnic, racial and national diversity, to have full representation in the executive board and within the management.

The difference is not only visible in Hungary and Poland. Implementing diversity programmes in the banking sector in the Czech Republic has had a positive impact on the industry as well (Egerová, D.; Jiřincová, M.; Lančarič, D.; Radovan, S., 2013: 350-366).

It is crucial to create a safe space for women to share their knowledge, experience and thoughts. This creates an environment for learning within the workplace, brainstorming and inventing best practices to be leveraged.

With a growing emphasis on diversity, reduction of pay gap and breaking the glass ceiling, more and more mentoring and development programmes will be created to address all these issues. To achieve this goal, banks have to be consistent in ensuring equal opportunities, recruitment and wages.

4. Epilogue

COVID-19 has had a strong influence on the global market, especially on unemployment rates. It is impossible to predict how the job market will look in the next 2-5 years. For the moment, there are few studies or articles focused on the post-pandemic future of the banking industry.

We can assume that along with growing interest in investing in V4 countries, the potential of women will not be overlooked, especially taking into consideration that the financial sector is hiring specialists from different areas – HR, IT, finance and business.

Grassroots action (e.g. Fundacja im. Lesława A. Pagi programmes for young professionals or student societies) is important to develop strong mind-sets, leadership skills and networking. In addition, the banking sector should foster strong work-life balance initiatives, which will allow women to manage their time effectively (Dabhade, N. and Yadav, R., 2014: 181-201).

The coming years will be challenging and hard to predict. However, recent months have shown that diversity and development are priorities for entrepreneurs.

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Chapter 10

HOW DATA ANALYTICS CAN (AND CANNOT) HELP TO CLOSE THE GENDER GAP ON LABOUR MARKETS

I have been working for the last five years in financial markets in different quantitative analytics roles, usually as the only one or one of few girls in quantitative teams. I remember when once, during a team meeting, our manager announced that he would be interviewing new candidates for a new quant developer role, and he encouraged us to give recommendations if we knew someone suitable for the position. ‘And you know,’ he added, giving us a cheeky wink, ‘since we need to address diversity criteria, it would be tremendous if your protégé was a gay woman of colour’. The other senior team member snorted. ‘Well obviously, I’m wholeheartedly for diversity,’ he sighed. ‘But most submitted CVs are from guys, that’s just reality. We should be willing to hire the best person, not tick the boxes...’.

I recalled this situation when going through different research papers and HR articles addressing the gender gap on labour markets. There are so many questions, conflicting views, contradictory conclusions. Does the pay gap exist? Are differences between men’s and women’s career choices and performance rooted in culture or biology, and regardless of the source, should we actively try to tweak them, or should we just leave well enough alone and, as my team member suggested, allow employers look for those who enjoy their careers and perform well, regardless of gender? Being used to navigating the chaotic world of financial market information, I intuitively tried to find some data-driven tools and frameworks that could help address at least some of these questions – not as a study of historical trends or for a future social agenda, but as a solution to practical, everyday questions: should a company hire Katie or Tom, and why? Should Andy or Anna be promoted to a senior role and why? The good news is that such data-driven tools exist; they are increasingly being used and further developed by HR personnel. The bad news is that these tools require mindful application. Let’s look at some examples.

To start with, my senior team member was correct: we should be willing to hire the best person, and we can assume that all companies start their hiring process with this goal in mind. The misunderstanding of what constitutes diversity criteria comes not from diversity being questionable itself, but from the flawed way these criteria are often applied. Here we have some space for an example of a bad data-driven approach: automated CV-screening, based on a company’s hiring history and/or popular wisdom (e.g. we only want to pick Ivy League graduates for interviews). If the first rule is used, it is likely our way of choosing candidates will be biased: the tool will repeatedly choose professionals who fit into those parameters. What should we do then, if it just so happens that the majority of people who excelled in their roles were white men? Did that happen

because they were genuinely better or because the hiring model never gave women a chance? One of the most glaring examples was the case of Amazon's hiring algorithm, abandoned in 2017 after three years of use: it was giving lower scores to female applicants (or even to attributes associated with women, such as participating in women's studies programmes), because historically the best performers in the company had disproportionately been men, and the algorithm was looking for people just like them.

Going for the other solution, say, choosing only candidates from top 10 schools and relying on employee referrals, does not solve these problems either. This one is trickier, because it is a more subtle vehicle of numerous unconscious human biases making hiring unfair. First, choosing people from a defined range of schools or our current employees' social circles will mean that we will consider candidates with a very similar background: trained by the same lecturers (in the case of schools) or recruiting from the same social circles as our current employees, resulting in a candidate pool with similar educations, social background, life experience and as a result, similar ideas and views. Hence, opting for such approach inhibits innovation.

There are also some additional bottlenecks even before the hiring process starts, that is, during the period when men and women are attending schools and universities. Their choices and performance will have already been influenced by gender biases at this stage and later on continue to influence inefficiencies in recruitment (remember the comment "most CVs are submitted by guys anyway"?). There was one interesting experiment conducted to study gender bias at universities: in a randomised double-blind study, science faculty members from research-intensive universities rated the application materials of a student – who was randomly assigned either a male or female name – for a laboratory manager position. Faculty members rated the male applicant as significantly more competent and hireable than the (identical) female applicant. They also selected a higher starting salary and offered more career mentoring to the male applicant. The gender of the faculty members did not affect responses: both female and male faculty members were equally likely to exhibit bias against the female student. Mediation analyses indicated that the female student was less likely to be hired because she was viewed as less competent.

The results of this experiment reveal two issues: the first is the one I initially addressed, that gender biases appear in the lives of both men and women well before they even enter the workforce and likely influence their career choices. Secondly, it shows that "traditional" hiring (defined as a qualitative assessment of a candidate's application) is deeply biased and clearly should be substituted with (or at least aided by) a well-designed algorithm.

All that being said, some readers might say at this point that the entire issue is exaggerated. Okay, so let's say a company uses its hiring history and some additional rules (preferred schools, employee referrals) to find suitable candidates. And let's agree it gives biased results in the form of an undiversified hiring pool. But if a company can still pick good employees at a relatively low cost (only simple hiring rules) and low risk (meaning, we have historical proof that white males with MBA degrees from Harvard make good managers), then maybe pushing for diversity is just an attempt to promote some fundamental notion of fairness regardless of economic utility?

This turns out not to be the case, and seems to be an important yet often neglected point when diversity is brought up in discussions about hiring processes. Diversity is not (only) a social justice concept – it has been shown that, in fact, diversity increases company efficiency, measured in increased revenue growth generated by the employee. Gallup Analytics, an HR consulting company, gathered data on hiring practices and outcomes for different clients they worked with. They observed that hiring the top 10% of manager talent helps to generate a 27% increase in revenue per employee and improvements in other critical measures, such as customer experience, turnover and sales management. Hiring less talented managers, however, costs businesses hundreds of billions of dollars in potential organic growth every year. And 82% of the time companies end up hiring sub-par talent in spite of the “we want to hire the best people” credo.

The reason? The best candidates (evaluated post-factum) are often screened out unintentionally by biased hiring processes, e.g. by excluding candidates lacking a certain education or social pedigree. Gallup has become one of more than 100 vendors (according to HBR author Peter Cappelli, who has studied the subject) of data science-driven tools, creating pre-hire assessments for all possible candidates. While these state-of-the-art tools, offered by different vendors, are still imperfect, as they can still carry biases by design (remember Amazon’s failed attempt!), there are two interesting conclusions emerging from looking at their outputs: first, thoughtfully designed algorithms, when not used as a black box, can help identify good job candidates. Second: the resulting improvement in hiring top talent is associated with improvement of diversity metrics. Therefore, operating a scarcity mindset around top talent and diversity and assuming it is too difficult to consistently have both (like in my team discussion example), is erroneous: these two aspects, if treated carefully, are highly connected. On the other hand, when an approach is used where diversity is sacrificed, and then “remedied” by box-checking, quota-filling exercises do not improve company efficiency and results in people feeling that the company is making “token hires”, which demeans qualified and talented candidates and creates a culture of mistrust rather than inclusion.

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