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### 3. Gender inequality and the under-representation of women in managerial positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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#### INTRODUCTION

The topic of gender equality at work has often been addressed, and still a focus on women in managerial positions seems of greater interest than ever before. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, women in particular face the double burden of work and responsibilities at home (Alon et al., 2020; Berghammer & Beham-Rabanser, 2020). Furthermore, women are still under-represented in managerial positions worldwide, although policy makers and researchers have for decades focused on ways to increase the representation of women in such positions (Kumra et al., 2014; Krell et al., 2018).

According to Eurostat, in 2018 nearly 9.4 million persons held a managerial position in businesses in the European Union (EU), of whom 3.4 million were women which represents 36 per cent or only about a third of all managers (Eurostat, 2019). Among the largest publicly listed companies in the EU in 2019, only 18 per cent of executives and 7 per cent of CEOs were women. By region, Eastern Europe accounts for 32 per cent of women in senior leadership positions (Catalyst, 2019). In the EU, women account for 27 per cent of board members, and only 17 per cent of senior executives in publicly listed companies. Given the fact that since 2012 women have represented almost half of all employed persons in the EU, women continue to be under-represented amongst managers (Eurostat, 2019).

Ever since the topic of women in the labour market and in managerial positions in the Western world has become well researched (e.g. Paoloni & Demartini, 2016; Bugdol & Pokrzywa, 2019; Castaño et al., 2019), research on Southern Europe shows that mainly cultural barriers contribute to the rare promotion of women to managerial positions in business firms. For instance, Southern European countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal or Spain hold on to strong traditions, with a woman's main responsibility being to care for the family (González et al., 2009). The Grant Thornton *Women in Business* report (2020) confirms that 27 per cent of female leaders in this region consider caring responsibilities outside work as a barrier to their professional advancement.

In contrast, the literature on gender equality has been relatively silent with regard to Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and especially transition economies in the region. Rare attempts include Delgadová and Gullerová (2017) who show that persistent gender stereotypes are the main factor contributing to the under-representation of women in managerial positions in Slovakia. However, the authors also show that characteristics attributed to women such as teamwork competency, emotional management and people orientation can be turned into strengths in the workplace. In their study on offering managerial positions to women,

Dobrovič et al. (2019) confirm the existence of stereotypes and a male dominated labour market for eastern Slovakia. In particular, family obligations limit women in getting into managerial positions. Similarly in Serbia, a patriarchal model of gender roles, including the uneven distribution of household and care work, poses strong barriers to the advancement of women at work (Tošković, 2013). Todorović et al. (2016) further highlight the difficult Serbian business environment, with high female unemployment and few entrepreneurial activities involving women. Also in Croatia, gender inequality is observable. In comparison with men, on average, women with the same education level earn less, perform lower-paid jobs, face difficulties in getting into managerial and higher-responsibility jobs and experience more disadvantages in their career moves (Petrović, 2000). Hence, women in senior leadership positions continue to be rare (Perkov et al., 2015). Although this short summary suggests substantial gender inequality to the detriment of women – and the existence of massive ‘glass ceilings’ – we still do not have sufficient knowledge on the obstacles that women striving for managerial positions face in Southeastern European transition economies. The presented studies are rare exceptions providing certain insights into some Southeastern European countries, and they do not address the specific context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: BiH).

With this chapter, we aim to provide more knowledge about gender inequality in transition economies and to raise awareness of the long road ahead. Using the example of BiH as a Southeastern European country moving towards a market-led economy we shed light on the challenges of women in the labour market and their barriers to securing managerial positions in light of the socio-economic and societal context. While more women are present in managerial positions compared to other OECD countries, they are mainly represented at the lower levels of management and are seldom able to contribute to decision-making processes (OECD, 2017). The specific context of transition economies can shed light on gender equality issues that might differ from the Western context and thus offer insights into more general debates about the under-representation of women in managerial positions and the underlying reasons.

In our empirical data within this chapter, we specifically look at the representation of women in managerial positions in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Scholarly knowledge on women in managerial positions in SMEs in BiH is limited to date (see e.g. Čelebić et al., 2018). However, such knowledge is important, as in BiH 99 per cent of companies are SMEs employing 64 per cent of the population (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2019).<sup>1</sup>

The chapter is structured as follows. We first outline the political and legal context of BiH as well as the position of women in society and the labour market. We then summarise prior research on the reasons for women's under-representation in managerial positions in BiH, followed by a presentation of our own empirical data on SMEs. We wrap up the chapter with a discussion section and our conclusions.

## POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

BiH is a former Yugoslav republic, located in the southwest of the Balkan Peninsula, which gained independence after secession from Yugoslavia in 1992. The country, with a population of 3.53 million people, is home to three ethnic groups – Bosniaks (50 per cent), Serbs (31 per cent) and Croats (15 per cent) – which together form the so called ‘constituent peoples’, and other peoples and citizens (4 per cent) (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2018a). BiH has seen a continuous decline in population in the past few decades (in 1991 the country had a popula-

tion of 4.37 million). The significant decrease in the number of residents is a consequence of both the war (April 1992 to November 1995) and the post-war period followed by the process of transition to a market economy (Mujić & Zaimović Kurtović, 2017). More recently, BiH has suffered severely from brain drain. A recent Gallup survey conducted between 2015 and 2017 shows that 40 per cent of highly educated residents leave the country (Gallup, 2020). The main reasons lie in economic factors and individuals' limited chances of finding a job in BiH, but also in long-lasting dissatisfaction with the general societal situation in BiH and the feeling that desired changes are happening too slowly or are not taking place at all (Mujić & Zaimović Kurtović, 2017).

The signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995 ended the war, but at the same time it created a complex administrative and specific political structure of the state. BiH is divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), which covers about 51 per cent of the territory (further divided into ten cantons and 79 municipalities), and the Republika Srpska (RS), which covers about 49 per cent of the country (divided into two municipalities). Additionally, the so called Brčko District is a third separate area. The state is headed by a three-member presidency, in which each member is from one of the constituent peoples. The main body is however the Office of the High Representative, created by the EU with the aim of overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. This complex administrative and political structure has been significantly slowing down and often paralysing the country's reconstruction and development in the past 25 years (Bieber, 2006; Toperich et al., 2017).

BiH has signed and ratified major international gender equality conventions, including the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Istanbul Convention (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, 2006). Additionally, in BiH's pre-accession process towards a candidate status for joining the EU, BiH signed a Stabilisation and Accession Agreement in 2008, which came into force in 2015. Thereby, BiH committed itself to a gradual harmonisation of its legal system with the EU. With the official submission of an application to the EU in 2016, BiH has committed itself to ensuring the promotion of gender equality and protection against gender-based discrimination (European Commission, 2020). Overall, BiH has developed a comprehensive legal framework. Table 3.1 presents the four most important sources, which are the Constitution, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and parts of the Labour Law.

Although the legal framework concerning gender equality and anti-discrimination is comprehensive, it is not without its problems. Implementation of the laws is limited in practice and overloaded courts have restricted capacity to handle cases dealing with discrimination against women (IFC, 2008). According to a recent report by the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH (2020), the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination has not been fully implemented. In addition, responsible institutions have not implemented the Law on Gender Equality effectively (Ćatović et al., 2017). Moreover, legislation has been criticised for being reactive rather than fostering equality (Kadribašić, 2013; Ortlieb et al., 2019).

The legal framework does not explicitly address the representation of women in managerial positions, but it refers in general terms to the prohibition of discrimination based on gender as well as the promotion of gender equality. However, specifically within the Law on Gender Equality, Article 20 refers to a quota regulation, albeit only for public institutions, as privately owned firms are not required to respect the quota. Thereby, gender parity in managerial posi-

Table 3.1 Legal framework for gender equality in BiH

Law	Most relevant content for the purpose of this book chapter
Constitution of BiH (adopted 1995)	Article II (BiH): guarantees gender equality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles 2 (FBiH), 10 (RS) and 13 (Brčko): prohibit gender-based discrimination</li> </ul>
FBiH Constitution	
RS Constitution	
Brčko District Statute	
Law on Gender Equality (adopted in 2003 and amended in 2009)	Article 2: regulates the obligations and responsibilities of respecting gender equality as one of the fundamental human rights, and prohibits discrimination based on sex and gender in all areas of life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Article 7: prohibits all forms of discrimination, including advertising vacancies, selection procedures, employment and dismissals</li> <li>• Article 8: stipulates non-discrimination in areas of pay, promotion, training and parental leave</li> </ul>
Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (adopted in 2009)	Article 2: establishes a framework for the exercise of equal rights and opportunities for all persons in BiH; prohibition of discrimination applies to all public bodies as well as to all natural or legal persons, both in the public and private sectors, in all areas, in particular: employment, membership in professional organisations, education, training, housing, health, social protection, goods and services intended for the public and public places, and the performance of economic activities and public services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of a Human Rights Ombudsman as the central institution for protection against discrimination</li> </ul>
Labour Laws of FBiH and RSble	Prohibition of discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of pregnant women at the workplace and women on maternity leave</li> <li>• Labour law of FBiH, Article 3: stipulates gender equality in several bodies, for instance works councils</li> </ul>

Source: CBBH (2020); FBiH Parliament (2020); RS National Assembly (2005); FBiH Government (2000).

tions is mandatory if the institution employs at least 40 per cent of each gender. In practice, however, this provision is not respected and legal violations by institutions are not punished (GAP, 2018, 2019). The reasons are manifold, but they centre on a traditional view of the position of women in society, and socially established patterns of behaviour by the political elite and those in power, who often have a disregard for equality, affect the under-representation and insufficient participation of women in public life as well as in political decision-making positions. Relevant actors, including political parties and representatives of public institutions, do not engage in the affirmation of women as equal participants in decision-making positions (GAP, 2018, 2019).

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIETY

The under-representation of women is evident in all areas, including education, work, public life and political decision-making (Ćatović et al., 2017). Although there have been some changes over the last decade, there is no area of life with significant progress in gender equality (Gavrić & Ždralović, 2019).

There is ample evidence concerning *labour market inequalities* in BiH. According to the 2020 ranking of the World Economic Forum's global gender gap (WEF, 2020), BiH ranks 109th out of 153 countries analysed in the sub-index for economic participation and oppor-

tunity. Compared to other countries from former Yugoslavia, the gender gap in activity and employment rate was the highest in BiH. For example, Croatia ranked 77th, Serbia 62nd, Montenegro 56th, and Slovenia ranked considerably better at 12th place. Women in BiH are however well educated. Among those with higher educational attainments women and men make up almost the same percentage. According to the latest census in 2013, there were 13 per cent of men with higher education, compared to 12 per cent of women. Among graduates, women outperform men. In 2018, almost 60 per cent of all graduates were women (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2018b). There is, however, a gendered pattern in study programmes. Women are more represented in education science, law and social sciences as well as social work, whereas men focus on engineering and IT (Gender Center RS, 2020).

Overall, the labour force participation rate in BiH is low at 42 percent (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2018b). While for men the participation rate is around 53 per cent, for women it is much lower at 31 per cent (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2018b). Women are also more likely to be long-term unemployed – in 2019, the number of women unemployed for 12 months or more was 17 per cent, compared to 14 per cent for men (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2020).

Those women who do find paid work earn significantly less than men, regardless of their education, age, occupation and industry. Based on data from 2015, the estimated gender gap in hourly wages for those in the 15–64 age group is around 9 per cent of men's average hourly wages (BAM 3.9 for men and BAM 3.5 for women, which is equal to around EUR 2 and 1.5 respectively) (The World Bank et al., 2015; Ortlieb et al., 2019). Further, women face multiple obstacles, such as waiting longer for their first job, long interruptions in work due to maternity leave or care of elderly and sick family members, or the inability for older women to reintegrate into the labour market (GAP, 2018). In addition, women predominate among the lowest-paid workers in the labour market; a large number of women are employed under fixed-term, part-time employment contracts or are excluded from the formal labour market, forcing them to work in the 'grey economy' (ibid.).

As in many other countries, the labour market in BiH is *horizontally segregated*, with women working in so-called 'female' professions (Radović-Marković & Lekić, 2008; Šehić et al., 2010; Somun-Krupalija, 2011). Segregation was partially institutionalised through law in socialist countries. Reflecting traditional gender roles, the main sector in which women are employed is in the service industry (over 66 per cent of employed women in 2018), including hospitality, retail, education, health and domestic services. These jobs are associated with precarity, including low wages paid irregularly, no welfare protection and poor working conditions (Kostovicova et al., 2020). Other sectors with an over-representation of women are agriculture, handicrafts, administration, health, education, culture and sport (Radović-Marković & Lekić, 2008; Šestić, 2009; Gačanica, 2019). Somun-Krupalija (2011) highlights the low status of a typical woman cleaner, compared to the significantly higher status of a bricklayer, lathe operator or truck driver, which are typically male-dominated occupations.

Regarding the *division of paid work and household/care work*, there is a patriarchal societal structure with a strict division of the roles of women and men in BiH. Women bear the brunt of unpaid labour, with women performing over 68 per cent of all unpaid work in the household (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2018b). Relatedly, prejudices and stereotypes towards women regarding the choice of occupation, the role in the family and household, and engagement in political and public life are prevalent and there is a noticeable trend of traditional acceptance of gender roles in public and private life (GAP, 2018). As a consequence, women face particular difficulties in balancing working and household roles (Somun-Krupalija, 2011).

From a gender equality perspective, these data are worrying because they indicate that women face limited opportunities to find work or give up work due to family obligations. The seriousness of the situation is confirmed by the recommendations from the Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in BiH (GAP, 2019) stating that women in social isolation, those living in remote settlements, mothers of children with disabilities, women close to retirement, those with disabilities, single mothers in the countryside and older women need more employment support.

In general, *women prefer 'safer' jobs* in the public sector (e.g. Pupavac, 2005; Šestić & Ibrahimagić, 2015; Dinc & Budic, 2016; Palalic et al., 2017). With the state still being acknowledged as the main power – a legacy from the socialist past – it is expected to provide a secure job indefinitely until retirement. Nuhanović et al. (2016) confirm the preference of women for public sector employment because of the generally unfavourable business environment, with financial insecurity and social dependence, but also its limited financial skills for women and scarcity of social benefits such as maternity pay and access to state nurseries (The World Bank et al., 2015). A study by Rahimić and Kožo (2013) shows that for employees in BiH, a safe workplace with a regular salary is the main motivator for work.

Looking specifically at *women in managerial positions*, we see a mixed picture in BiH. Women are under-represented in managerial positions across sectors, although their share is often higher compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2017). Šehić et al. (2010), based on data from 55 medium-sized and large companies in BiH, found that half of these companies had 25 per cent women line managers. With regard to representation in management boards, over two-thirds of the analysed companies had a share of 25 per cent of women, but only in nine companies was the CEO a woman. The 2014 Agency for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees study on a sample of 70 of the top 100 companies in BiH shows a lower representation of women on management boards. On average, 15 per cent of board seats were held by women, but half of the companies surveyed had no women on their boards at all (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, 2014). According to the World Bank et al. (2015), women in BiH held 24 per cent of managerial positions (Palalic et al., 2017). The 24 per cent female share of employment in managerial positions is also shown in the most recent Labour Force Survey data (ILO, 2019). This is higher compared to other countries in the region (where it is on average around 21 per cent, see Cancho & Nihal, 2015) as well as in other OECD countries. Specifically for SMEs, a study commissioned by the World Bank (Cancho & Nihal, 2015) found that in BiH, the opportunity for women to hold a managerial position in a SME is relatively high, at around 30 per cent. Another study conducted in BiH by the IFC (2013) revealed a share of 3 per cent of female top managers in medium-sized enterprises, but a large share of 32 per cent of board seats occupied by women.

BiH's socialist heritage is certainly one of the reasons for a larger share of women in managerial positions, compared to other OECD countries. During the time of the former Yugoslavia, women were able to participate in the socio-economic sphere on an (almost) equal footing with men. However, this development was in stark contrast to the general patriarchal society of the Yugoslav republics, which was less visible in former Yugoslavia but still very much intact in the family sphere (Pešić, 2009). Women were able to work but were still solely responsible for the household (see Simić, 2018a, 2018b). Even in former Yugoslavia it was seldom the case that a woman occupied the most important position in a state-owned company. Women were rather in mid-management and in less prestigious managerial positions (Tančić & Brašnjić, 2017).



This holds true today. A closer look shows that women in managerial positions in SMEs and larger companies are mainly at the lower levels of management, which does not allow them to participate significantly in the strategic decision-making processes in such companies and they earn less compared to men (e.g. Penava & Šehić, 2007). A study on wage gaps in BiH shows that women in management earn on average 78 per cent of a man's salary in the same position and that the leadership positions for women are found in less prestigious departments (Kolektiv, 2020). Finally, after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the war period of the 1990s, an accelerated re-traditionalisation and strengthening of patriarchal views contributed to the deterioration of women's position in society in general, including in business (Slapšak et al., 2006). Women were more frequently pushed into the home and rights acquired during socialism were eroded (Tančić & Brašnjić, 2017). Thus, one cannot speak of a favourable position for women in business in general, and in managerial positions in particular. The main obstacle to the advancement of women in society is seen in the patriarchal tradition that does not allow women to transcend the inherited frameworks and norms that determine her position in the family and public life, customs that leave women with fewer rights and freedoms than men, and the law that does not try to consistently implement the provisions on the equality of men and women (Šehić et al., 2010; Tančić & Brašnjić, 2017).

## WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS: REASONS FOR UNDER-REPRESENTATION

Barriers for women in managerial positions have been the subject of extensive international research for several decades (see e.g. Schein, 2007; Powell, 2014; Krell et al., 2018). The main barriers include a variety of issues around how the management position is perceived as well as the dual burden women face at work and at home. In her seminal study in the 1970s on stereotyping in management ('think manager, think male'), Schein identified that management is seen as a male profession, and that male managers perceive women as less capable of taking on management responsibilities (Schein, 1973, 1993). Over three decades later, the author confirmed the continuous existence of the stereotype. Management is still seen as a male area, with little regard to reconciling work and family obligations for managers (Schein, 2007). Other barriers are related to the workplace culture effectively excluding women by emphasising, for example, the requirement for long work hours in the office for senior management, which are incompatible with family obligations (Padavic et al., 2019), or simply to a disregard for the obligations employees might face outside of work, which still predominantly are a woman's responsibility (Rutherford, 2001; Davaki, 2016).

Furthermore, exclusion from informal male networks, the so called 'men's clubs', are still one of the greatest barriers to women in management, because women have fewer networks compared to men, or they fail to utilise their existing networks (Ibarra, 1993; Rutherford, 2001; Greguletz et al., 2018). Studies focusing on transition economies show the exclusion from male networks to be particularly pronounced. Visi (2014) identifies the glass ceiling in Albania where women were not promoted to challenging managerial positions in the analysed sectors (public administration and banking) because men were keeping such positions for themselves and promotion is done through networking among men. Similarly, a study in Croatia shows that women who made it to the top often have difficulty maintain such posi-

tions, because men make crucial decisions in 'boys' clubs' and women are marginalised even if they are in the top management (Kučić, 2014).

In the case of SMEs, women experience different conditions compared to larger companies, which affect their representation in managerial roles. In BiH, SMEs are found across the country, although over 70 per cent are in the FBiH (mainly in the Sarajevo Canton – around 23 per cent), with around 30 per cent in the RS (OECD, 2019). Earlier studies suggest that familiarity in SMEs might be better suited to including diverse employees (Cassell et al., 2002; Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). The role of women in SMEs might however be more ambiguous. They can be in managerial positions, but they may be less prestigious ones and thus they remain voiceless when it comes to strategic decision-making in companies. Thus, the glass ceiling phenomenon is also present in SMEs (Songini & Gnan, 2009).

While the picture is similar to many other countries worldwide, in BiH we find salient grounds for under-representation in the country's structural, societal and legal environment (see also Knežević, 2016; Arslanagić-Kalajdžić et al., 2019).

First, women in managerial positions in BiH are marginalised due to the *stereotypical perception of management as a male domain* (Schein, 2007). While the legislative basis is sound, the main issues are still prevalent in practice. Studies analysing the share of women in managerial positions show that in many organisations gender equality is not an issue on the agenda of the top management (see Penava & Šehić, 2007). Although an IFC (2013) study highlights that board diversity is important for company success, women only become board members at an advanced age, with, compared to men, higher levels of education and experience (ILO, 2018). In addition, a glass ceiling, formed through stereotypes, chauvinism, prejudices, discrimination after maternity leave or male vanity, presents a barrier for women on the way to the corporate top as it is also associated with isolation, limited access to mentorship and abuse (Šehić et al., 2010). For example, access to advanced training and education for civil servants is more often granted to men (Šehić et al., 2010). Research also indicates the tendency of 'covert' discrimination in public institutions with an evaluation scoring system used by superiors in the civil service, punishing employees who, for example, reject advances by superiors or report gender-based discrimination (Gačanica, 2019).

Second, the perceived *traditional role of women in a patriarchal society* impedes women in their professional advancement. Rahimić et al. (2014) identify factors such as the persistence of a male chauvinistic mindset that sees women at home rather than in a successful business position (see also Šehić et al., 2010). Such traditional role systems with women in the role of a mother, wife, housekeeper and carer for elderly people, and men in the role of the breadwinner, increase the dependency of women on men (Nuhanović et al., 2016). If women are employed, often their jobs serve as a source of income to pay household expenses, but there is little need for women to invest in their career and professional advancement (The World Bank et al., 2015; Arslanagić-Kalajdžić et al., 2019). Due to the strict patriarchal society a woman's salary is hence considered as secondary (Pupavac, 2005). Consequently, women are frequently subject to prejudices arising from traditional patriarchal social norms and face various difficulties that prevent them from reaching the higher positions in which decisions are made (Somun-Krupalija, 2011). The pejorative perception of women as successful business leaders and the segregation into typically female and typically male professions based on very deep stereotypes of desirable occupations and professions result in woman-dominated occupations being the least respected in society (Radović-Marković & Lekić, 2008). Šehić et al. (2010) confirm the absence of support from society due to strong patriarchal heritage and



traditional societal norms, which influence stereotypes on women and lower their perspectives for achievements and career development.

Third, the *double-burden* of caring for family members and managing a career restricts women from getting into managerial positions. Women need to balance work and family, which requires them to play multiple roles (Nuhanović et al., 2016). Đulić and Kuzman (2013) address factors such as long work hours, overtime and required availability beyond regular work hours, which limit the chances of women for promotion to a managerial job. A further reason lies in the restricted mobility of female employees due to household and childcare responsibilities (IFC, 2008). The lack of accessible and affordable childcare facilities and the reluctance of employers to continue a working relationship with a new mother or to consider them as potential applicants for new positions are outlined in the weak implementation of the legal framework (Somun-Krupalija, 2011). The discrimination in promotion after maternity makes a re-entry in the labour market after childbirth difficult and leads to gaps in employment even if women had made good progress in their career before giving birth (ibid.).

Finally, Rahimić et al. (2014) also show that the *limited self-confidence of women* compared to men can be a reason for the under-representation of women in managerial positions. Šehić et al. (2010) confirm that low self-confidence, a preference of women for a family over a career and an absence of support in society explain the slow advance of women in business professions. The roots may be traced to the early socialisation of girls and boys in BiH society (Somun-Krupalija, 2011). Strict gender roles are enforced from childhood on through the family and the education environment. A survey of 140 women and 140 men in managerial positions by Deloitte (2013) shows that the perception of women as being softer and less dominant than men is one of the reasons explaining fewer women at higher-level positions. Although the respondents did not question the professional capabilities of women for managerial positions, their ambition and lack of general masculine traits are considered necessary for career advancement and promotion.

While the reviewed literature provides a broader picture on gender inequality in BiH, our own study takes a closer look on the representation of women in managerial positions in select SMEs, along with individuals' experiences concerning women managers.

### **Zooming In: Illustrative Data from a Survey on Women in Managerial Positions in SMEs in BiH**

The study was conducted during August and September 2019, and it focuses on the perception of women on their career advancement towards managerial positions in BiH. The study included 49 women and nine men working in SMEs in the Sarajevo Canton. It mainly addressed the current position of the respondents and issues they faced in their career advancement. Survey questions covered topics such as working time, the possibility of managing work-life balance, pay, promotion and specific support for women. The online survey was sent out to 300 contact persons in SMEs in the Sarajevo Canton. The respondents were identified via personal networks, and via associations of SMEs, and were contacted via email as well as telephone.

The respondents were overwhelmingly young (between 24–49 years) and 43 per cent had a tertiary education. The respondents were employed in SMEs from different sectors, e.g. production, engineering and the IT sector. The companies ranged from small (up to 30 employees) to medium enterprises (50–250 employees). Over 40 per cent of the respondents were in a mana-

gerial position or heads of departments. Specifically, 41 per cent of women respondents were department heads, indicating managerial responsibility. However, the CEOs of the companies were mostly men, 66 per cent, whereas 34 per cent were women. Furthermore, 90 per cent of the respondents noted that there were either no or only one woman in the top management team. Specifically, in companies with over 50 employees there were no women in the management team, indicating a glass ceiling that women face in their career advancement. Women in managerial positions in our sample worked in less prestigious units, such as HR or administration, and earned lower salaries. The respondents provided information on their average monthly wages, which showed a striking wage gap. Over 44 per cent of the respondents noted differences in wages in comparable positions, to the detriment of women. The average wage of the women in our study was between 1,000 and 1,300 BAM (~ 500 and 650 Euros),<sup>2</sup> which is fairly low considering that 41 per cent were in a managerial position.<sup>3</sup>

Our findings show however that over 75 per cent of the respondents saw women as capable leaders, whereas at the same time over 65 per cent of the respondents noted that women were not well represented in managerial positions. Furthermore, while women show higher engagement at work (81 per cent of the respondents saw them as more engaged compared to men), this engagement does not seem to lead to promotion in the workplace for women. According to the respondents, in over 60 per cent of the companies men were promoted faster than women. Women only rarely see female role models in positions of power. Our respondents also confirmed that there are stereotypes ingrained in society, which have been passed on through generations, with men as the ideal leader and women primarily responsible for the family.

Around 43 per cent of the respondents indicated that their companies have not adopted programmes aimed at fostering gender equality. However, almost 40 per cent of the surveyed women stated that they would welcome such programmes. Additionally, over 50 per cent of the women stated that their employers generally claim to support training for women to enable them to develop their careers. However, findings indicated few efforts with regard to gender equality in the workplace. A specific question asked respondents to indicate if there is any leave offered for family care, which over 70 per cent of respondents denied, noting that their employers do not provide any measures to reconcile work and family life. Over 35 per cent of the respondents noted that there is no specific or tangible training or support of women in their career development.

Overall, the findings contribute to the indication that in SMEs women are more often in managerial positions compared to in larger companies, but they also highlight gender-related issues. These can be grouped into issues regarding pay and promotion to top managerial positions as well as with regard to gender equality in the workplace (or lack thereof). However, it is also clear that almost all of the surveyed women see themselves in a managerial role and are willing to take on responsibility and demanding tasks in their companies. It has to be noted here that all the women participating in the study were overwhelmingly young and at the beginning of their career, which might explain a different worldview regarding a woman's role in society and ultimately in the labour market compared to older generations. A recent study (Kadić Abaz & Hadžić, 2020) on the economic activity of women in BiH, based on a sample of 1,213 interviewed women, revealed generational differences between women in the labour market. The authors show that younger women (below 30 years of age) often hold less traditional views of women in society (i.e. that women should take care of the household, while the men should 'provide' for the family), whereas older women (above 30 years of age) more often believe that men are responsible for earning a salary and that women should not work.

## DISCUSSION

This book chapter sheds new light on the under-representation of women in managerial positions in BiH. We identify barriers for women's career development and their under-representation in managerial positions in BiH in light of the societal and structural context. While previous findings show that the strong perception of women as being mainly responsible for the family and less assertive in the BiH society is reflected in the views of women themselves, despite their education, we show a more nuanced picture with a generational divide between women with regard to their ambitions to take on managerial roles. Structural barriers include the weak implementation of existing legislation and managerial practices as well as the favouring of men in society.

Ingrained prejudices and stereotypes about the perception of women and their role at work include various forms of discrimination due to traditional, social, cultural and psychological mechanisms which foster a continuous gender pay gap and a glass ceiling for women. Although this might also hold true for other countries, the unique context of the BiH transition economy makes it even more difficult for women to advance to managerial positions. We see the following five reasons.

First, despite an adequate level of education, *women are sidelined in managerial positions*. This is due to a strong vertical segregation with 'male' and 'female' occupations in the BiH labour market, which marginalises women. Women in BiH represent the majority among university students and are well educated, but our findings show that men assume managerial positions and very little effort is made to support women in their career development. This is confirmed also by an earlier study (IFC, 2013), where 80 per cent of women surveyed noted that human resource policies generally do not support them in their careers and that career development plans are not flexible enough to reconcile and enable the various roles and ambitions of a woman. Women find themselves in less prestigious positions with little opportunities for strategic decision-making, while men are promoted faster. This is intriguing, as the percentage of highly educated women in BiH is growing every year but is still not mirrored by an equal distribution of men and women in managerial positions across the country. As our own study in SMEs shows, even when women are in managerial positions, these tend to be less prestigious and not as well paid (see also Songini & Gnan, 2009).

Second, while the legislative base for gender equality is solid, *the regulations and laws are not fully implemented*. This can be seen in a lack of support and difficult working conditions for women with, for example, insufficient breaks, a lack of protection in cases of robbery and violence, and exposure to sexual harassment or mobbing at the workplace (Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH, 2020), along with discrimination due to pregnancy or maternity. Although the legal framework exists, many women do not report discriminatory incidences, because they do not trust the judicial system, they fear negative reactions from their co-workers or family, or sometimes they do not even know about support facilities (ICVA, 2014; Gačanica, 2019). Our study confirms this, as the respondents overwhelmingly note the absence of any measures supporting gender equality.

Third, a *strong patriarchal view on women's role in business and society* does not support the ambitions of women to progress into managerial positions. The transition process from a self-governing socialist system towards a market economy in BiH has contributed to a re-traditionalisation, further cementing the traditional roles of men and women. Patriarchal company structures and practices that favour men (see also Nuhanović et al., 2016) do not

only strengthen a glass ceiling but also allow men to advance faster in their careers compared to women. While women were supported in their education and employment in the former Yugoslavia, this was combined with a patriarchal view on society. This was somewhat surprising during the Yugoslav self-governing system, but it has made a strong comeback during the transition process (Tančić & Brašnjić, 2017). Looking at the BiH society now, one can see strong traditional views of women in the sphere of work, coupled with a disregard for equality, as well as oftentimes an opaque system of promotion in business, where decisions are made during informal meetings, making it difficult for women to move up to positions of power as well as to succeed once they achieve such positions. Women who do not perceive themselves in the traditional and stereotypical way continue to experience barriers in participating in positions of power in business (and society). Overall, they are not encouraged on their way into managerial positions, and those already in such positions are not supported (Tančić & Brašnjić, 2017). Our study underlines this, as the women surveyed believe that men are given more positions of power in business and that employers favour men. This, however, does not seem to impact on their willingness to participate in the labour market and, as confirmed by our data, to take over responsibilities in managerial positions in the future. This is somewhat contradictory to the general view of women in the BiH society as well as to the view women often have themselves about their role at work and at home, as outlined in our final point below.

Fourth, a *depreciative self-perception of women in managerial positions*. As we show in our empirical data, women do not see role models in positions of power. Strong gender roles enforced in families and society impact on the way women see themselves and their careers (Somun-Krupalija, 2011). Coupled with stereotypes about women and their place in society and the perception that women are not seen to be capable of being a manager or leader, this results in a lack of confidence of women in their ability to take on a managerial position. We can confirm a big divide in the progressive views of younger women and the traditional views of older women in the BiH labour market (Kadić Abaz & Hadžić, 2020). Our study on SMEs reveals that young women increasingly believe that they have the education or capability for managerial positions and that they are generally as ambitious as men. This is encouraging and shows a slight change in the mindset of younger women in particular regarding leadership positions and it challenges the prevailing view of women as the ones who are looking for safe jobs in the public sector.

Finally, the overall *awareness of gender equality across society is low* (see also Gačanica, 2019; Ortlieb et al., 2019; Somun-Krupalija, 2011; IFC, 2008). Few women's NGOs focus on women in the private sector and their initiatives often miss out on real changes in the political, social and economic opportunities of Bosnian women. This further contributes to an under-representation of women in the labour market in general, and in powerful positions in particular. However, the under-representation of women in managerial positions is a societal issue. Companies face consequences, because they do not utilise all available talent in the labour market, and society itself faces consequences, because BiH faces a brain drain, and such barriers for women in their career advancement will only further exacerbate this trend (Mujić & Zaimović Kurtović, 2017). It is especially important to emphasise this in BiH as a transition economy, which is undergoing both a process of transition and a rather slow post-war reconstruction of the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we contribute to the ongoing discussion of women in managerial positions and shed light on barriers in the specific context of a transition economy in Southeastern Europe. Identifying the barriers of under-representation of women in managerial positions in BiH contributes to the strengthening of awareness of gender inequality in transition economies. We see several implications resulting from our chapter. For BiH women themselves it is necessary to further improve their self-confidence and reflect on the way they see their roles in business and society, in addition to continuously improving their knowledge, skills and abilities. Mentoring activities can play a role here, so that women see different role models and positive examples of other women. For the institutional level in BiH it is necessary to create a support framework for women. The existing legislation needs to be properly implemented and complied with. Additionally, structural support is necessary to encourage women in their careers, including adequate childcare options, parental leave for mothers and fathers, and no stigmatisation of working mothers, as well as fathers, who decide to go on parental leave (Agency for Gender Equality, 2020).

We see the biggest challenge for the future to be changing the ingrained traditional, social and cultural stereotypes, which effectively cement a gendered approach to work and life in BiH society. We do see a faint light at the end of the tunnel with a change in the self-perception of younger women in BiH, who are not lacking ambitions, but who due to the patriarchal societal structure do not see yet developments in society mirroring their endeavours. Women in business are still under close public scrutiny in the BiH society and successful women are characterised as ‘masculine’. How can this be overcome? How can the division of work and life be more equal through, for example, creating incentives for utilising shared parental leave without stigmatising men who care for children and take up parental leave? How can women gain more confidence to claim their space in managerial positions, without risking stigmatisation and shame? Tackling these challenges requires a joint effort from the government to enforce the implementation of laws, from businesses to actively promote gender equality at work, and from every member of society in BiH to accept and promote women towards the top.

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## NOTES

1. The numbers are for 2017.
2. The average wage for women in BiH is 1,059 BAM, whereas the average monthly wage for men is 1,180 BAM.
3. Since the number of men who contributed to the survey is low, a comparison is difficult. However, for the majority of the nine men surveyed, the average wage was between 1,300 and 1,700 BAM.

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