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# Women's representation in executive positions of public companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

## *Gender analysis*

Bosnia and Herzegovina

2022



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‘This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and co-funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Udruženje Prava za sve and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.’

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public companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Gender analysis**



Title: Women's representation in executive positions of public companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Original title: Zastupljenost žena na rukovodećim pozicijama javnih preduzeća u Bosni i Hercegovini

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CSO Prava za sve [Rights for All] thanks to the directors Suzana Tihi-Babić, Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić, Samra Lučkin, and Ines Tanović for taking part in the interviews and contributing to this analysis with their valuable comments. Also, we thank the executive directors of public companies in BiH who participated in the survey. We especially thank our colleague Maida Omerćehajić for her help in collecting data and processing text in accordance with technical standards.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
RS	Republika Srpska
BD	Brčko District
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECHR	European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
GAP III	EU Gender Action Plan III
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights I
ILO	International Labor Organization
PE/PC	Public enterprise/Public company (also State-owned enterprise – SOE)
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning
MDG	Millennium development goals
SDG	Sustainable development goals
UN	United Nations
UNSA	University of Sarajevo
GEL	Gender Equality Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has ratified several international treaties and adopted laws aimed at establishing gender equality and eliminating discrimination on any grounds. Yet, women in BiH are still not equal and suffer various forms of discrimination. Inequality is present in almost all areas, especially in the sphere of politics and political work, as well as in labor and economy. However, the attention of the general and professional public is much more focused on discrimination against women in political and public life (which is extremely important, of course), and much less on discrimination against women in the sector of labor and access to positions of economic power and decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

Women's economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality. Women's economic empowerment includes women's ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies; and increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.<sup>2</sup>

This gender analysis aims to point out the distribution of economic power and leadership in BiH, the real situation in terms of equal opportunities for men and women in the context of women's influence on economic policy making and distribution of economic power. The essence of human rights is to have the state ensure, through the law and practice, that each person will have the right to equal treatment, and thus enjoy all guaranteed rights without discrimination and on an equal footing. The analysis provides an assessment of (non) implementation of equality laws and policies in the country and the existing relationship between the norms and practical reality of BiH.

The recognition, enjoyment and protection of women's rights are characterized by the gap between the norms and the real situation, the underrepresentation of women in politics and the unequal distribution of economic and social power. It should be taken into account that the legal system in BiH is still inconsistent and continues to provide opportunities for gender discrimination due to inconsistencies in the laws, uneven application of these laws, as well as the lack of effective monitoring of their implementation.<sup>3</sup> Also, the reports of the European Commission (EC) continuously draw attention to the special problem of the lack of statistics disaggregated by gender when it comes to the representation of women in different sectors and the pay gap. For the first time the EC Report for BiH 2021 in part *Civil Service and Human Resource Management*, states that gender equality in the civil service is at an early stage and only a few senior executives are women.

The interviews with representatives of civil society organizations, academia, women employed in various sectors such as public companies, banking, and media led to conclusion that the involvement of women in executive positions in economic decision-making in BiH need be analyzed. Achieving gender equality in the workplace is a great challenge for every society, including BiH. Any form of discrimination against women in the field of work, and especially in career advancement, prevents their equal participation

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1 Women are continuously underrepresented in the legislative and executive branches. The results of the 2018 General Elections have not yet been fully implemented. The average share of women in the governments formed so far is about 18%. The House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH has 21% of women (9 out of 42), while in the House of Peoples that percentage is 20% (3 out of 15). In the November 2020 local elections, 29 women and 396 men ran for mayor. In the three cantons of the FBiH, no woman ran for mayor; while in the other cantons the average share of women candidates was 10%. In the Republika Srpska, 6 out of 8 cities did not have a woman candidate for mayor, and the same is the case in 50 out of 56 municipalities. Only four women were elected mayors of municipalities/cities in BiH.

2 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures> (visited on 10/20/2021)

3 Assessment of the Impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women, <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2021/1/izdanje%20br%203rodna%20ravnopravnost%20u%20fokusu%20bosna%20i%20hercegovina.pdf?la=en&vs=5605>

in making important economic decisions, which are, in the context of BiH, often reform decisions. As this analysis shows, the number of women in executive positions of public companies is still low, even when there is gender equality at lower levels.

The mere legal regulation of the position of women by which they have been granted formal equality is by no means sufficient to make this equality a reality in practice. The stereotypical and traditional understandings about the place and role of women as mothers in the first place, i.e., wives are still omnipresent, and preserving family is their most important responsibility. Most women in high political and other positions always emphasize their superhuman strength and ability to succeed in meeting all business obligations, in addition to doing housework and caring for children, thus perpetuating the generally accepted view that women alone are responsible for caring for family and children. This understanding strongly perpetuates the current social views on this issue.

It has long been clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected men and women equally. Women, who account for 67 percent of jobs in the health and care sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are at the frontline of the crisis.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the increased need for unpaid domestic work and family care deepens the existing gender inequalities in the division of unpaid work. Due to overburdened health and care systems, and the closure of schools caused by the pandemic, women are facing a much greater burden of doing unpaid work in the household and caring for the family at home.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2019, the European Commission (EC) adopted the Opinion on BiH's application for EU membership, and instead of recommending the granting of candidate status to BiH, it listed 14 priorities in which progress should be made so that the EU Council could decide on the next steps. One of the priorities is to strengthen the protection of the rights of all citizens, notably by ensuring the implementation of the legislation on non-discrimination and gender equality.<sup>6</sup>

Equal representation of women and men is crucial for the progress of society as a whole, and the exclusion of women from executive positions of economic power means that women's knowledge, attitudes and talents are not used. The practice of developed European countries shows that, among other things, a balanced representation of women and men in the labor sector and economic decision-making positions is important for improving the country's prosperity and overall progress.<sup>7</sup>

The EU committed to promoting equality between women and men in all its activities. BiH, as a country that aspires to join the EU family, must take concrete steps towards the practical application of all laws and meeting other requirements set ahead of it in the process of European integration.

Finally, the analysis seeks to show the unequal representation of women and men in economic decision-making processes in public companies in BiH, which in contrary to the relevant laws. It also seeks to contribute to an essential understanding of the legal obligations, needs and importance of involving women in executive positions in public as well as in private companies and corporations. This is particularly important in the post-pandemic period when many things will change in all segments of society, and especially in the economy and economic development sectors of all countries. Women must not be excluded from these changes, and their economic position must be strengthened and brought in line with the law.

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4 COVID-19 and the World of Work Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses Bosnia and Herzegovina  
[https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/publications/WCMS\\_774439/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/publications/WCMS_774439/lang-en/index.htm)

5 ibid

6 Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union  
<http://europa.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Misljenje-Komisije-o-zahtjevu-Bosne-i-Hercegovina-za-%C4%8Dlanstvo-u-Evropskoj-uniji.pdf>

7 How gender equality is a growth engine for the global economy, Renee Morad 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/know-your-value/feature/how-gender-equality-growth-engine-global-economy-ncna963591>



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## METHODOLOGY

This section describes in detail the methodology used during the analysis and writing of the report, as well as the data collection sources and techniques.

The analysis was made using a mixed methodological approach combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data were obtained by a combination of different methods, the so-called triangulation, which provided different insights into the problem of why women are underrepresented in positions of economic power in companies. Quantitative data were collected through the analysis of current national, regional and international legislation and policies focusing on gender equality, desk research of existing research and reports on this topic, primary and secondary data collected through questionnaires, analysis of relevant statistics and data on the number of women in executive positions in public companies. The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with women in executive positions in various sectors. During the analysis, a convergent parallel design was used with quantitative and qualitative approaches taking place at the same time, independently of each other.

In collecting data on women in executive positions in the public companies, we analyzed a total 54<sup>8</sup> of 108 public companies in which BiH, FBiH, RS and BD<sup>9</sup> have ownership share. The share of ownership was not a disqualifying criterion for the analysis. Due to the small number of public companies in which BiH and Brčko District have an ownership share, all such public companies from these two levels were analyzed, because otherwise, due to the small sample, wrong conclusions could be rendered. The analysis included 50% of all public companies from each the Federation and RS. The analyzed companies from FBiH and RS were selected randomly<sup>10</sup> against the criteria of different geographical positions in the Entities, different category and size. The analysis was conducted in the period from April to December 2021. Collected were data on the number of women holding executive director position<sup>11</sup> and sitting on boards of public companies.

For the most comprehensive analysis, specific data on the opinions and experiences of women in executive positions in public companies were collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 13 questions divided into two parts.<sup>12</sup> Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with women in executive positions in the public, private and banking sectors. The aim was to get a broader picture and compare data on opportunities for promotion and appointment of women to executive positions, as well as their political agency in these sectors. Three interviews were conducted with one woman from each of the three sectors.<sup>13</sup> In addition to these interviews, interviewed was also the executive director of the Gender Equality Agency, the agency which together with other institutional gender equality mechanisms in the country contributes to achieving gender equality in BiH through gender mainstreaming of all areas of private and public life.

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8 4 public companies owned by BiH, 24 public companies owned by the Federation of BiH, 24 owned by RS and 4 public companies owned by Brčko District

9 We used data from the State Owned Enterprises Database from Transparentno.ba portal, launched by Transparency International in BiH. It is currently the only comprehensive database of state owned enterprises in BiH, and the data on the portal are periodically updated.

10 Every second or third public company from a certain entity was selected from the SOE database of the Transparentno.ba portal, taking into account that public companies from different geographical positions, categories and sizes of public companies are represented.

11 This term implies the highest executive position in a public company.

12 The first part referred to demographic data, which include age, education, marital status and position in the company. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions about the beliefs and perceptions of the respondents about the possibilities of women's access to executive positions.

13 The interviews consisted of three groups of questions: starting positions, experiences and perceptions, and the power and influence of politics. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform, each of which lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and authenticated.



The analysis had certain limitations which were reflected in the following:

- Publicly available data on public companies are very scarce, as there is no regularly updated centralized register of public companies in BiH. Also, some companies either do not at all have or do not regularly update their official websites. Such restrictions may affect the main conclusions regarding the representation and involvement of women in public companies. To minimize this limitation, data from the *transparentno.ba* portal were used. The database is maintained by the relevant civil society organization, which periodically updates all the data thus reducing the possibility of errors in data collection. In addition, the information were verified against accessible and evidently active websites of public companies, which are regularly updated and/or through contacting directly public companies via email. Data obtained during the analysis were compared with the findings of similar analyzes and research conducted in BiH, so even if some data were inaccurate, it did not ultimately affect the conclusion on the representation of women in executive positions in public companies. During the analysis, special attention was paid to the fact that all publications, research and reports, which were used as data sources, were issued by relevant institutions/organizations and that they meet the minimum methodological standards.
- Another limitation was the response rate of the participants to the questionnaire. The answers were anonymous and there was no way to know in which public companies women who answer the questionnaire worked. This means that the answers could be mostly given by women from large companies, which would illustrate the opinions and experiences of women from those companies while ignoring the opinions and experiences of women in smaller companies and vice versa. This limitation was mitigated through semi-structured interviews with women in executive positions in companies from various sectors, as well as an interview with the director of the BiH Agency for Gender Equality, who has been dealing with the issue of discrimination against women for many years. This is an advantage of a mixed methodological approach, which made it possible to overcome the problem of generalization. The results of qualitative research complement the quantitative results. The qualitative analysis provided a better understanding of the context and barriers that women face. It must be noted, however, that the results of the qualitative analysis cannot be generalized and do not apply to the entire population.

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## OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Gender equality must not be just a slogan, but a key principle of social and economic responsibility. The problem of every inequality of women in BiH, including economic inequality, primarily has deep roots in patriarchal heritage and social stereotypes, and male dominance on the political scene is directly related to male dominance in the economy. Simply, political power also ensures economic power, hence the underrepresentation of women on the political scene is directly reflected in the underrepresentation of women in executive positions of institutions, public companies and other bodies that make strategic decisions in the field of economy or finance, even though the higher-level representation of women in these positions is required under the positive legal regulations. In this way, women in BiH are excluded from all-important political and economic processes and decisions.

### National instruments

*BiH Constitution, as well as the Entity constitutions, contain a general prohibition of discrimination, including a prohibition of discrimination based on sex. **The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina**<sup>14</sup> is a document that imposes an obligation to maintain “the highest level of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms”. The constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including sex. Also, it stipulates that the **European Convention** for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols (ECHR) shall “**directly apply in BiH**” and shall “**take precedence over all other laws**”.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as an integral part of the Constitution of BiH, Annex I (Additional human rights agreements applicable in BiH) lists also (among other important human rights instruments) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).*

The Entity constitutions also incorporate international human rights standards in various ways. ***The FBiH Constitution also prohibits any discrimination based on sex***, while the Annex to the FBiH Constitution lists **21 additional international agreements for the protection of human rights, which has the force of constitutional provisions**.<sup>16</sup> ***RS Constitution*** also lists many individual human rights that it specifically protects, and Article 10 of the RS Constitution **guarantees equality and equity of all citizens irrespective of differences, including gender differences**.<sup>17</sup>

Gender equality as one of the fundamental human rights was for the first time regulated in the legal system of BiH by the *adoption of the **Gender Equality Law***<sup>18</sup> (GEL), which also prohibits discrimination based on sex and gender. This Law sets out in detail, promotes and protects gender equality, and guarantees equal opportunities to all citizens, both in the public and private spheres of life. GEL states that: “**gender equality means that men**

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14 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina [http://www.ccbh.ba/public/down/USTAV\\_BOSNE\\_I\\_HERCEGOVINE\\_bos.pdf](http://www.ccbh.ba/public/down/USTAV_BOSNE_I_HERCEGOVINE_bos.pdf)

15 Additional Protocol No. 12 annexed to the 2000 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms enshrines the general prohibition of discrimination as set out in Article 1: The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. (2) No one shall be discriminated against by any public authority on any ground such as those referred to in paragraph 1. Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/searchon-treaties/-/conventions/rms/0900001680080622>

16 Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina [http://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/english/federation/ustav\\_hr\\_stari.htm](http://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/english/federation/ustav_hr_stari.htm)

17 Constitution of Republika Srpska [https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/sites/default/files/upload/dokumenti/ustav/lat/ustav\\_republike\\_srpske.pdf](https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/sites/default/files/upload/dokumenti/ustav/lat/ustav_republike_srpske.pdf)

18 Official Gazette of BiH, 16/03, 102/09, consolidated text - 32/10, <https://arsbih.gov.ba/project/zakon-o-ravnopravnosti-spolova-u-bih/>

*and women are equally present in all spheres of public and private life, they have equal status, equal opportunities to exercise their rights, and equal benefit from the results achieved.”*<sup>19</sup> Also, the Law stipulates that *“the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a strategy that defines programmatic goals for achieving gender equality in all spheres of social life and work, both in the public and private spheres.”*<sup>20</sup>

The Law requires that all state bodies, at all levels of government organization, and the local self-government bodies, including the legislative, executive and judicial branches, political parties, legal entities with public authority, **legal entities that are owned or controlled by the state, entity, canton, city or municipality or over whose work a public body exercises control, shall secure and promote gender equality.** The following paragraphs of the same Article says that **“equal gender representation exists when one of the sexes is represented with at least 40% in the bodies referred to in the previous paragraph of this Article. Discrimination on the grounds of sex shall be considered a situation when there is no equal representation referred to in paragraph (2) of this Article.”**<sup>21</sup>

The GEL prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex and preclusion of **promotion at work under equal terms, and equal opportunities for education, training and professional development.**<sup>22</sup> The Law states, among other things that **“legal entities with public authority, legal entities owned or controlled by the state, entities, cantons, cities or municipalities or over whose work the public authority exercises control, shall secure and promote equal gender representation in management, decision-making and representation.** To ensure the implementation of legal obligations, the competent authorities are obliged to take all appropriate measures, including but not limited to a) adopting a program of measures to achieve gender equality in all spheres and at all levels of government; b) enacting new or amending existing laws and regulations to harmonize them with the provisions of this Law and international gender equality standards; c) implementing activities and measures from the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina through regular programs of work and ensuring budget resources; d) ensuring the collection, management, analysis and presentation of gender-disaggregated statistics;

It is very important to emphasize the importance of equal access to education and choice of occupation and the breaking of stereotypes about the so-called. women’s occupations, because only in that way are women allowed a truly free choice of occupation. The analysis also shows that these provisions of the Gender Equality Law have not been applied when appointing women to executive and other leadership positions in public companies. Even where women make up the majority of employees, they are very rarely in management or supervisory bodies, which shows that there is a so-called “glass ceiling”<sup>23</sup> which is obviously very difficult to penetrate.

In addition to the GEL, BiH has also adopted the **Law on Prohibition of Discrimination.** These laws constitute the set of non-discrimination legislation in BiH. The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination at the very outset, in Article 2 says: **“discrimination shall be any different treatment including any exclusion, limitation or preference based on real or perceived grounds towards any person or group of persons, their relatives, or persons otherwise associated with them, on the grounds of their race, skin color, language, religion, ethnic affiliation, disability, age, national or social background, association with a national minority, political or other persuasion, property, membership in a trade union or any other association, education, social status and sex, sexual orientation,**

19 Article 9, paragraph (b) GEL

20 Article 9, paragraph (g)

21 Article 20 GEL

22 GEL, Article 13, paragraph 1, points b) and c)

23 Glass ceiling is a term that describes the barrier to advancement of women and other minorities to the highest executive positions in the business hierarchy, regardless of their qualifications and achievements.



***gender identity, sexual characteristics***, as well as any other circumstance serving the purpose of or resulting in prevention or restriction of any individual from enjoyment or realization, on equal footing, of rights and freedoms in all spheres of life.

Prohibition of discrimination shall apply to all public bodies, all natural and legal persons, in public and private sector, in all spheres, especially: employment, membership in professional organizations, education, training, housing, health care, social protection, goods and services designated for the public and public places, and conducting of economic activities and public services.<sup>24</sup> It is especially important to point out that the provisions of this Law shall apply in the proceedings conducted based on this Law in cases when other laws are not harmonized with this Law.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of the application of GEL provisions in BiH, it is important to point out the status of international sources of law in the constitutional system of Bosnia and Herzegovina because ***the Gender Equality Law guarantees gender equality in accordance with generally accepted rules of international law and ratified international agreements***, and we know that many acts of international law regulate and protect gender equality. The constitutional provisions that create the constitutional framework for the status of international sources include in particular: (a) the principle of direct application of international law (ratified conventions and generally accepted rules of international law) explicitly established by the Constitution. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the constitutional rule according to which national courts are obliged to adjudicate not only based on the Constitution and domestic laws but also based on international treaties; (b) the precedence of international law over domestic law and the requirement of harmonization of domestic law with international standards; and (c) the right to the protection of human rights before international bodies, which includes two basic forms of protection. The first includes monitoring the implementation of international human rights standards as an obligation of the state, but also as the right of other entities, such as civil society, while the second guarantees the right to individuals to turn to international human rights bodies, including the right to address the appropriate international courts.<sup>26</sup>

However, despite the evident improvement of the legislative framework for gender equality, the desired improvement has not been achieved in practice. The legally required participation of 40% of women in all positions in different bodies and levels of government and political or economic decision-making, as well as in public companies and institutions, has not yet been reached. Women are still economically disadvantaged in every sense and therefore significantly less involved in the country's economic development, and they are not involved in economic reform and policy-making.

Indeed, BiH has made significant efforts to align its legal framework with international standards and obligations. Despite the particularly complex governance structure, and the different levels of decision-making, ***gender institutions*** are in place and actively operating under the state and entity governments, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. All institutional mechanisms have a precisely defined mandate, which indicates at least a formal commitment of the authorities to achieve gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all areas of social life. BiH Gender Equality Agency in BiH and Entity gender centers are responsible for launching initiatives and proposing measures and are key entities responsible for implementing and monitoring the gender mainstreaming process in BiH.<sup>27</sup> These three institutional gender equality mechanisms are the key lever in initiating and implementing activities in the field of

<sup>24</sup> Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 59/09); Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 66/16)

<sup>25</sup> Article 24 *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Commentary on the Gender Equality Law, 2011, <http://rightsforall.ba/bs/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/11/2-komentar-zakona-o-ravnopravnosti-spolova-u-bih-2011.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Gender mainstreaming i.e., integration of the gender equality principle

gender equality. However, these institutions face difficulties in implementing the GEL, accessing gender-disaggregated data and gender analysis that could inform the process of planning, reforming and investing resources.<sup>28</sup>

### Labor legislation

***The Labor Law of the Federation of BiH<sup>29</sup> contains an explicit prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination*** of workers and jobseekers based on, *inter alia*, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, family responsibilities and pregnancy, as well as other personal traits. Discrimination is prohibited in all aspects of employment, including employment conditions and selection of candidates for a particular job, working conditions and all employment rights, education, training, promotion and termination of an employment contract. At the same time, any harassment or sexual harassment, gender-based violence as well as systemic harassment at work or related to work (mobbing) is prohibited<sup>30</sup>. The law also envisages protection in cases of discrimination, which a worker or a person seeking employment may request not only from the employer but also in court.

The Labor Law of the Brčko District of BiH<sup>31</sup> regulates the prohibited grounds and prohibition of discrimination in the same way, but it additionally defines sex, the use of maternity leave, leave for child care and leave for special child care as unjustified grounds for dismissal.

The Labor Law of the Republika Srpska<sup>32</sup> explicitly states only gender and “other personal traits that are not directly related to the nature of the employment” as the prohibited grounds of discrimination relevant to this analysis. However, the Law also contains a special article stipulating that all persons are equal in the employment process and that gender-based discrimination is explicitly prohibited in the recruitment process, during employment and termination of employment, except in the case of stipulated special measures, such as affirmative action. This law also prohibits harassment, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and systematic **abuse of workers**. As for the protection against discrimination, the Law envisages court protection only, while the possibility of seeking protection from the employer is not available.

### Laws on Public Enterprises

According to the Law on Public Enterprises in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>33</sup>, the relevant activities of social interest are based, *inter alia*, on the principle of equal treatment and freedom of establishment and provision of services. The same law stipulates that when appointing members of the Supervisory Board, the provisions of the Law on Ministerial, Governmental and Other Appointments of the Federation of BiH shall apply. According to these provisions, in addition to standards set by law, a

28 <https://arsbih.gov.ba/oblasti/institucionalni-mehanizmi-za-ravnopravnost-spolova/> (accessed on 21.10.2021)

29 Labor law of the Federation of BiH (Official Gazette of the Federation of BiH, 26/16 and 89/18)

30 Harassment, sexual harassment and mobbing are forms of discrimination under the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, and gender-based violence, harassment and sexual harassment are forms of discrimination under the GEL.

31 Labor law on Brčko district of BiH (Official Gazette of BD BiH, 34/2019, 2/2021, and 6/2021)

32 Labor law of the RS (Official Gazette of RS, 1/16 and 66/2018)

33 Law on Public Enterprises in the Federation of BiH (Official Gazette of FBiH, 8/05)

responsible public official has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the selection process is in line with the legal principles, while not discriminating against anyone based on sex, marital, or family status.

The same legislative solution can be found in the Law on Public Enterprises of the Republika Srpska<sup>34</sup>. Law on Public Enterprises of the Brčko District of BiH<sup>35</sup> also calls for the principle of equal treatment in carrying out the core activities of public companies, laying down the general conditions for appointing executives, while special conditions for members of the Board are to be determined in the founding act of the public company.

Finally, it is important to note that all laws and other legal acts must be in line with the provisions of the Gender Equality Law of BiH and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which is particularly important in the context of ensuring at least 40% of underrepresented sex in the state bodies at all levels of government, which in practice almost always applies to women.

### International instruments

**International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** and Optional Protocols (1966 and 1989)<sup>36</sup> contain the most important international legal protection of economic, social and cultural rights. BiH, as the State Party to the Covenant, is obliged to ensure equal rights for men and women to enjoy all the rights listed in this Covenant. Among other things, it shall undertake to ensure ***“equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and competence”***. *All persons are equal before the law* and have the right, without any discrimination, to equal legal protection. **The law should prohibit any discrimination** and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination based on race, color, **gender**, language, religion, political and other opinions, national and social origin, property, gender, or any other status.<sup>37</sup> The state is obliged, *inter alia*, to take legislative and other action, using the maximum of its available resources, to ensure that all rights enshrined in the Covenant are guaranteed to all without discrimination.<sup>38</sup>

**International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**<sup>39</sup> also obliges State Parties to the Covenant to guarantee the application of the Covenant’s rights without discrimination on any grounds, including discrimination based on sex. The State is obliged to ensure equal rights for men and women to enjoy all the rights, and all persons are equal before the law and have the right, without any discrimination, to equal legal protection.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**<sup>40</sup> is the most important and the first international document that deals exclusively with women’s rights by establishing equality and eliminating discrimination against women. Its preamble states, *inter alia*, that:

*“discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and humanity.”*

34 Law on Public Enterprises of Republika Srpska (Official Gazette of RS, 78/11)

35 Law on Public Enterprises of Brčko District of BiH (Official Gazette of BD BiH, 22/2018 and 5/2020)


36 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/>

37 Article 26, *ibid*

38 Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the Pact, Part B, Principle 25 (UN Document E/CN.4/1987/1. The Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)

39 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance with Article 49 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

40 8 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>



The Convention aims to affirm the fundamental human rights and values of all human beings, equality and equity irrespective of any difference on any ground. This is the first international charter on women's rights, which very precisely sets out the obligations and action plan of states to meet the set standards and thus ensure the enjoyment of established rights. To achieve this, it is necessary to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women by any person in any sphere of life, especially in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil and family sectors, both in law and practice.

Thus, the Convention imposes the obligation on member states to eliminate discrimination and ensure full development and advancement of women, with the aim to accelerate equality between women and men. These include, inter alia, the obligation of the ***“States Parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, to achieve the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or stereotyped roles for men and women.”***

The Convention defines discrimination against women as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.<sup>41</sup> States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, and agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake *“to adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women”*; *“to refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation”*; ***“to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise”***. Looking at the scope of protection, the CEDAW Convention imposes an obligation on the states to eliminate discrimination by the state (including public companies and companies under public control), but also to *“eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise”*. Therefore, the state shall prevent discrimination against women and provide effective protection against any act of discrimination by private employers or individuals during recruitment, in exercising the right to work and rights issuing from employment, access to services, etc.<sup>42</sup>

All the above international documents are of utmost importance for the elimination of discrimination on any grounds and the establishment of equity and gender equality. As part of the BiH Constitution, they directly apply in the BiH legal system, and although the application has not yet taken root in practice, it is to be expected that in time it will become part of regular legal argumentation in protecting the rights before courts.

***The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*** define several key areas: women's poverty, inequality in education and training, unequal access to health care, violence against women, the position of women in armed conflict, ***inequality in economic***

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<sup>41</sup> Article 1, *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> Commentary on the Gender Equality Law, 2011, <http://rightsforall.ba/bs/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/11/2-komentar-zakona-o-ravnopravnosti-spolova-u-bih-2011.pdf>



**structures and policies and approaches to resources, inequality in power and decision-making processes, insufficient mechanisms to promote women's progress at all levels**, lack of respect and inadequate promotion and protection of women's human rights, stereotyping of women and inequality in access to and participation in communication systems, gender inequalities in natural resource management and environmental protection, and discrimination against the girl-child and the violation of the rights of the girl-child.<sup>43</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly adopted **the 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Plan** (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).<sup>44</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue the mission of the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and serve, among other things, to create **"a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed"**.<sup>45</sup>

*Of the 17 development goals, **SDG 5** is about the position of women - "Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls" - Ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; Eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; Eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; Recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate; Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed under the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences; Undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws; Enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; Adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.*<sup>46</sup> The BiH Statistics Agency (BHAS) has revised the availability of data for indicators to monitor the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, of the 14 indicators for SDG 5, not a single indicator is available in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there is no information on any activities being aimed at collecting any data related to gender equality. Gaps in gender-disaggregated data are evident in many other aspects of life. This was particularly evident during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. All informal reports of international institutions and civil society

43 Women's representation and involvement in executive positions in public companies owned by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021, [http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija\\_izvjestaj\\_o\\_rodnoj\\_analizi\\_bos\\_final.pdf](http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija_izvjestaj_o_rodnoj_analizi_bos_final.pdf)

44 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

45 [http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija\\_izvjestaj\\_o\\_rodnoj\\_analizi\\_bos\\_final.pdf](http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija_izvjestaj_o_rodnoj_analizi_bos_final.pdf) (accessed on 20.10.21)

46 *ibid*

organizations suggest that measures to mitigate the crisis consequences for public health have had a negative impact on gender equality. It follows from this that gender equality is not essential for government institutions, nor is it their political commitment. How else to understand the non-monitoring of indicators, except that everything is regulated just to 'tick the box', without a real intention to make the change in real life?

### European Union

Gender equality is one of the key values of the EU, a fundamental right and one of the main principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is also an essential precondition for an innovative, competitive and prosperous European economy.

The European Parliament has always been very active in promoting equality between men and women and has a standing committee on women's rights and gender equality.<sup>47</sup> In February 2021, the Parliament adopted a resolution assessing the progress made in the field of women's rights over the past 25 years and identifying the many remaining challenges. MPs expressed their concern about the reactions of some EU countries, fearing that gender equality may become a less important item on the agenda of Member States. The Parliament called on the Commission to ensure that women's rights are taken into account in all its proposals, to develop concrete plans to reduce women's poverty rates and to step up efforts to reduce the gender pay gap.<sup>48</sup>

It should be noted that the EU is a global leader in gender equality: 14 EU Member States are among the top 20 world leaders in gender equality. Thanks to comprehensive legislation and extensive case law in the field of equal treatment and gender mainstreaming efforts, and regulations to eliminate certain inequalities, the EU has made significant progress in the field of gender equality over the last few decades.<sup>49</sup> The so-called "European non-discrimination law" means that there is a single system of anti-discrimination rules that applies throughout Europe, which comprises different sources. However, the promotion of equality between women and men and the prohibition of all forms of discrimination will remain one of the main challenges in the coming years.

***Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union***<sup>50</sup> was adopted in 2000 and was replaced by the Lisbon Treaty from the date of its entry into force. Article 21 of the Charter ***prohibits any discrimination*** based on ***sex***, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age, or sexual orientation. According to Article 23 equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including ***employment, work, and pay***. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favor of the under-represented sex.<sup>51</sup> With the Non-Discrimination Directive, the Charter provides a

47 [https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/eige\\_hr](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/eige_hr)

48 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/hr/headlines/society/20190712ST056961/kako-se-parlament-bori-za-ravnopravnost-spolova-u-eu-u>

49 Ibid.

50 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2016/C 202/02) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12016P/TXT&from=RO>

51 Women's representation and involvement in executive positions in public companies owned by the Federation

wider scope of anti-discrimination protections in the legal order of the European Union.

**2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy (The Strategy)** was adopted in March 2020 by the European Commission and it is an important document that sets an ambitious framework on how to promote gender equality in Europe and beyond. It is based on a vision of a Europe in which women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free from violence and stereotypes and have the opportunity to thrive and lead towards a gender-equal Europe.<sup>52</sup>

The main goals are to end gender-based violence, break gender stereotypes, eliminate gender-based differences in the labor market, achieve equal participation in different sectors of the economy, combat gender pay and pension gaps, eliminate the gender gap in care, and achieve gender balance in decision making and politics. The strategy implementation is based on the dual approach i.e., gender mainstreaming in combination with targeted measures and intersectionality, as a horizontal principle for the implementation of the strategy.<sup>53</sup>

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said:

*“Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union, but it is not yet a reality. In business, politics and society as a whole, we can only reach our full potential if we use all of our talent and diversity. Using only half of the population, half of the ideas or half of the energy is not good enough. With the Gender Equality Strategy, we are pushing for more and faster progress to promote equality between men and women.”<sup>53</sup>*

Gender stereotypes and the ubiquitous imbalance between private and business life are some of the main causes of gender inequality not only in BiH but also in EU countries. This is evident from the Strategy, which emphasizes that **improving the work-life balance of workers is one of the ways of addressing the gender gaps in the labor market. Both parents need to feel responsible and entitled when it comes to family care. The Work-Life Balance Directive<sup>55</sup> introduces minimum standards for family leave and flexible working arrangements for workers and promotes equal sharing of caring responsibilities between parents. The Commission will ensure that the Member States correctly transpose<sup>56</sup> and implement this directive to enable men and women to equally thrive both personally and professionally, and calls upon the Member States to go beyond these minimum standards in reviewing their policies.<sup>57</sup>**

The commitment of the European Commission to ensure equal participation of women in management positions is reflected in the fact that the Strategy states: **“The Commission will push for the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance on corporate boards which set the aim of a minimum of 40% of non-executive members of the under-represented sex on company boards.”<sup>58</sup>**

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of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021, [http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija\\_izvjestaj\\_o\\_rodnoj\\_analizi\\_bos\\_final.pdf](http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija_izvjestaj_o_rodnoj_analizi_bos_final.pdf)

52 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN> (accessed on 20.10.2021)

53 Gender Equality Strategy, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_hr](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_hr)

54 [https://ec.europa.eu/croatia/News/strategija\\_za\\_rodnu\\_ravnopravnost\\_teznja\\_za\\_unijom\\_ravnopravnosti\\_hr](https://ec.europa.eu/croatia/News/strategija_za_rodnu_ravnopravnost_teznja_za_unijom_ravnopravnosti_hr) (accessed on 26.10.2021)

55 Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance of parents and carers.

56 The Work-Life Balance Directive shall be transposed by Member States by 2 August 2022 (and by 2 August 2024 as regards payment of the last two weeks of the minimum of two months of parental leave).

57 A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, adopted in March 2020 by the EC

58 *ibid*

For BiH, as a country aspiring to become a member of the EU, all this is extremely important because in the accession process national legislation needs to be harmonized and/or newly adopted to match the core values and human rights standards embedded in European legislation. Thus, the Strategy explicitly states that ***“the EU promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment in its international partnerships, political and human rights dialogs with third countries, EU trade policy as well as in the EU’s neighborhood and enlargement policies, including in the context of accession negotiations and the Stabilization and Association Process.”***<sup>59</sup>

**EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)**<sup>60</sup> was adopted based on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025, which calls for a gender-equal Europe and gender-equal world, and which is in line with the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. This plan will increase the EU’s contribution to achieving SDG 5<sup>61</sup> in all areas of EU internal and external policy and help implement the 2030 Agenda.

The aim is to curb the rise of inequality in the difficult context created by the COVID-19 health and socio-economic crisis and accelerate the progress in gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Also, the EU is committed to leading by example, striving towards a gender responsible and balanced leadership, and focusing on results. This is particularly important, because the progress in achieving gender equality may be assessed only against the results achieved.

Being based on the EU’s assessment of support for gender equality and consultations of participants, GAP III provides an EU policy framework to increase the level of its involvement, focusing on five pillars of action: Increasing the effectiveness of EU engagement in the field of gender equality as a cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its work on policies and actions

- Cooperation with the Member States at the multilateral, regional and national levels, building partnerships with key actors, civil society, and women’s organizations
- Focus on key areas of engagement
  - Eradication of gender-based violence
  - Sexual and reproductive health and rights
  - Economic and social rights and empowerment
  - Equal participation and equality in leadership positions
  - Women, peace and security
  - Green transition and digital transformation
- Set an example for others by establishing gender-sensitive and gender-balanced leadership at the highest political and governance level in the EU
- Focus on results, accountability and transparency through qualitative, quantitative and inclusive monitoring

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59 Ibid.

60 Gender Action Plan – putting women and girls’ rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world Brussels, 25 November 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2184](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184)

61 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>



**Directives** constitute the so-called secondary EU legislation because they govern the issue of nondiscrimination more precisely and comprehensively.<sup>62</sup> Directives do not replace the laws of the Member States, but the Member States undertake to adapt their national legislation to these provisions of the Union. They are explicitly referred to the Member States. However, citizens of the Union will be at a disadvantage if a Member State fails to take the necessary implementing measures to achieve the objective of the directive that would benefit them, or if the measures taken are not adequate.<sup>63</sup> The European Court of Justice has refused to tolerate such a disadvantage and has found in several cases that Union citizens can invoke in such circumstances that a directive or recommendation has direct effect in the proceedings before national courts to ensure that the rights conferred on them are exercised.

The EU non-discrimination directives provide various degrees of protection:

- protection against racial discrimination and discrimination based on ethnic origin is the broadest and includes access to employment, social care, and goods and services;
- discrimination based on sex is prohibited in the context of access to employment, social security (which is narrower than social care) and goods and services;
- sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief and age are legally protected grounds only in the context of access to employment.<sup>64</sup>

**Directive 2006/54/EC** is significant in terms of implementing the principles of equality of opportunity and equal treatment of men and women in the field of employment and labor relations.<sup>65</sup> This so-called recast Directive on equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men in matters of employment and occupation merged some of the older directives. It requires a ban on direct and indirect discrimination based on sex, harassment and sexual harassment, pay, (access to) employment and social security schemes. ***It prohibits discrimination in relation to promotion and access to vocational training and advanced vocational training***, which in the case of European legislation includes practical work experience. To this end, employers and those responsible for access to vocational training should be encouraged to take effective measures to prevent all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, in particular harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace, in access to employment,

<sup>62</sup> The legal order of the European Union prohibits discrimination on several levels. First of all, the so-called Founding Treaties (Treaty on European Union and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) which contain a series of provisions that value the importance of the principle of equality and prohibit discrimination [http://www.era-comm.eu/oldoku/SNLLaw/10\\_Preliminary\\_ruling\\_procedure/120SDV53\\_Selanec\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.era-comm.eu/oldoku/SNLLaw/10_Preliminary_ruling_procedure/120SDV53_Selanec_Paper.pdf) (accessed on 10/18/2021)

<sup>63</sup> Since the introduction of the first directives in this area in the 1970s, the EU has developed comprehensive legislation on gender equality, primarily in the field of employment, covering equal pay, social security, employment, working conditions and harassment (Directive 2006/54 / EC); self-employment (Directive 2010/41 / EU) and guaranteed rights to maternity and parental leave (Directives 92/85 / EEC and 2010/18 / EU). The EU framework also includes legislation on equal access to goods and services (Directive 2004/113/EC) and the protection of victims of human trafficking and crime (Directives 2011/36 / EU and 2012/29/EU; Promoting equality between women and men: [https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/data/pdf/focus/focus10\\_en.pdf](https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/data/pdf/focus/focus10_en.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Introduction to European non-discrimination law: context, development and key principles [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Handbook\\_non\\_discrim\\_law\\_HRV.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Handbook_non_discrim_law_HRV.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-deeper-and-fairer-internal-market-with-a-strengthened-industrial-base-labour/file-equal-pay-for-equal-work-legislation#:~:text=The%20current%20equal%20pay%20legislation,number%20of%20earlier%20legislative%20acts>.

vocational training and promotion, in accordance with national law and tradition. ***The Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC***<sup>66</sup> on the establishment of a framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation bans discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion or belief, age and disability as regards employment and occupation and related areas such as vocational training and membership in organizations of employers and workers<sup>67</sup>. ***Directive on equality between women and men 2006/54/EC***<sup>68</sup> guarantees equal treatment for women and men when it comes to salary, occupational social security systems, access to employment, vocational training and ***promotion*** and working conditions. ***Directive 2019/1158*** is the key directive trying to strike ***a work-life balance for parents and carers***, which is a challenge to families across the EU with children or sick or elderly family members. Different countries have different ideas about what a healthy work-life balance and a healthy work week look like. There are large differences between countries in terms of how much paid or unpaid leave they grant to parents and carers and how flexible the working arrangements are. This Directive allows the Member States to enact national laws to regulate this area, move away from old patterns and gender stereotypes, and actively promote gender equality, greater opportunities for women and more inclusive labor markets. The goal is to help parents, especially fathers, take more family leave and benefit from flexible working arrangements.<sup>69</sup>

***Directive 2019/1158***<sup>70</sup> on the work-life balance of parents and carers repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. The disproportionate distribution of work and life responsibilities between women and men has led the EU to improve the legislative framework to correct this inequality and involve men more in household chores. ***The main objective of this Directive is for men and women to assume an equal share of responsibilities in family affairs.*** It lays down the minimum requirements designed to achieve equality between men and women with regard to labor market opportunities and treatment at work, by facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life for workers who are parents, or carers. This means that, among other things, EU members will have to ensure more flexible working hours and arrangements, paid leave for fathers and other carers, all in order for them to better reconcile work and family life, thus providing women with more opportunities for paid work, and ultimately contributing to gender equality. On the one hand, it will respond to the needs of today's families, while on the other hand, it will contribute to increasing women's employment, pay and career development. Overall, this will have a positive impact on women and on the economic well-being,

66 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32000L0078&from=LV>

67 Similar to the Racial Equality Directive, the Employment Equality Directive applies to persons in the EU in both public and private sectors, but it does not cover discrimination on grounds of nationality. It also envisages several specific exceptions to the application of its provisions.  
([https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Handbook\\_non\\_discr\\_law\\_HRV.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Handbook_non_discr_law_HRV.pdf))

68 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054>

69 It also gives opportunity to workers to take free time to care for relatives. The law allows fathers to take a 10-day parental leave with a minimum pay equal to pay received by those on sick leave. Two of the current four months of parental leave cannot be transferred from one parent to another. Leave for carers will be increased to five days a year per worker, as decided by national governments. Governments will be free to adapt the rules to special needs, such as those of single parents or adoptive parents or parents of children with disabilities. The measures should help more women return to work. The directive came into force on August 1, 2019, and Member States have three years to transpose it into their national law.

70 <https://ravnopravnost.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Europska%20unija/DIREKTIVA1158%20EUROPSKOG%20PARLAMENTA%20I%20VIJE%C4%86A.pdf>

social inclusion and health of their families. *Directive 2002/73/EC*<sup>71</sup> amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions. It introduces substantial and procedural changes to the “old” Equal Treatment Directive, providing, in particular, clarification of definitions of terms such as direct and indirect discrimination and (sexual) harassment. Although the new Directive generally reflects the spirit of case law, it does so without any originality or proactivity, which means that European legislation still does not fully respond to the challenges of achieving gender equality.<sup>72</sup>

Member States and EU institutions have made great efforts over the last few decades to establish gender equality in various areas of life and work, but the number of women in leadership positions remains low, both in political and economic decision-making.

In order to address this recognized imbalance between women and men in economic decision-making at the highest level, **back in 2012, the EC put forward a proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges.** The directive has not been adopted to date. The explanatory memorandum to this Directive states that **the persistent underrepresentation of women on boards is a key element of a broader lack of board diversity** in general with its negative consequences. The proposal sets a goal of at least 40% of members of the underrepresented sex in company boards, which should be achieved by 2020 in the private sector and by 2018 in public sector companies if the directive was then adopted. The companies would be required to make appointments based on pre-established, clear, neutrally formulated criteria. In the case of equally qualified candidates, the priority would be given to the underrepresented sex. The Member States would require listed companies to compile an annual report on the composition of their boards, and those in breach of the provisions would be sanctioned. The directive would not apply to SMEs. Companies that have not achieved the 40% target should continue to apply the rules of procedure, and explain the measures they intend to take to achieve it.<sup>73</sup> Overall, this is very important, and to break the glass ceiling the EC will advocate for the adoption of a proposal for this directive to improve the gender balance in the company’s boards of directors. In addition, in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) the Commission will publish data on the representation of women and men in decision-making positions and analysis of trends in this area.

The EC President Ursula von der Leyen affirmed the importance of equality for the EU in her political guidelines, promising to put together the majority needed for deblocking this directive. This is one of the priorities in the new EC strategy on gender equality 2020-2025 and is among the priority proposals pending in the EC work program for 2022.<sup>74</sup>

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71 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2002/73/oj?locale=hr>

72 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:FEST.0000026117.71863.56>

73 Several countries that have introduced relevant legislative measures, including France, Italy, Belgium, Germany and recently Austria and Portugal, have had positive results. See: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-report/more-gender-equality-corporate-boardsonly-few-member-states>

74 Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. See: <https://rdd.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti//Strategija%20za%20rodnu%20ravnopravnost%202020.-2025.pdf>

## ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS IN PUBLIC COMPANIES IN BIH

Representation of both women and men is crucial for successful leadership. Inclusive and diverse leadership is key to addressing the complex situations that decision-makers face nowadays. More inclusion and more diversity are key to proposing new ideas and innovative approaches that are conducive to a dynamic and prosperous EU society. Enabling citizens from all backgrounds to participate meaningfully in society is a necessary precondition for a functioning democracy, which leads to more effective policy-making.

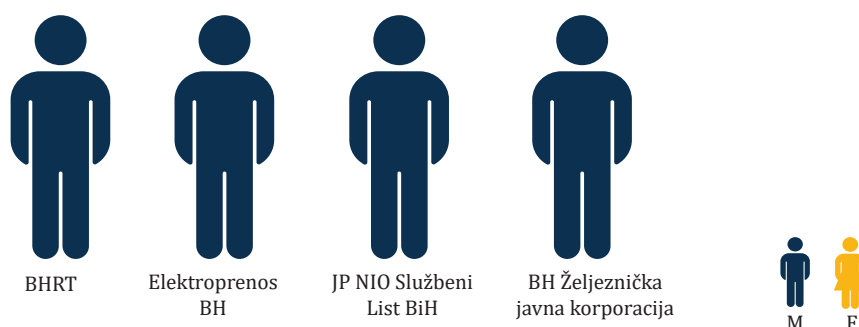
BiH has a complex administrative structure, with responsibilities being divided among the state, Entities, cantons, municipalities, and Brčko district, which makes the data collection and country-wide research very complicated. It is very difficult to obtain data on the number of public companies and the share of state ownership in them. There is no single database formed by state institutions that would be considered a relevant source of data. Existing registers kept at the Entity level are not regularly updated, do not have enough information on the details of the work of public companies and do not cover all companies. For this reason, this research has not covered the public companies at the level of cantons in the FBiH and municipalities across the state.<sup>75</sup>

The analyzed data showed no women holding the position of executive director of public companies at the state level.<sup>76</sup> In the Brčko District, a woman is executive director of only one of the four public companies. Also, of all analyzed public companies from RS, a woman is at the executive director of only one public company, which accounts for a minimum of 4% of the participation of women from the analyzed public companies. The situation is somewhat better in the public companies in the FBiH, where women account for 16.6% of executive directors.

In 2020, the School of Economics of the Sarajevo University (UNSA) conducted a comprehensive analysis entitled "Women's representation and engagement in public companies owned by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina"<sup>77</sup>. They analyzed the data of 42 public companies owned by the FBiH, and according to their findings, women account for 15% of executive directors of public companies, which corresponds to a 16.6% established in this analysis for the FBiH.

Executive directors in state level public companies

Figure1:  
Representation of  
women in the positions  
of executive directors of  
public companies at the  
state level



<sup>75</sup> However, it should be noted that the data analyzed in this research point to the practice of selecting managers to POEs and therefore are illustrative of the situation at lower levels. To this end, the conclusions of this analysis can be considered relevant to the situation in POEs at all levels of government in BiH.

<sup>76</sup> It refers to the public companies in which BiH has an ownership share.

<sup>77</sup> The analysis is available at: [http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija\\_izvjestaj\\_o\\_rodnoj\\_analizi\\_bos\\_final.pdf](http://www.efsa.unsa.ba/ef/sites/default/files/publikacija_izvjestaj_o_rodnoj_analizi_bos_final.pdf)

The International Labor Organization (ILO), in its survey from May 2019, said that about 20% of women hold executive positions in BiH.<sup>78</sup> Although this share of women in executive positions is very low, it is still better than the share established in the research conducted as part of this analysis. However, particularly worrying is the share of women in executive positions in the analyzed companies at the state level, RS and BD, which is significantly worse than in FBiH, where the share is far below 40% required under the GEL. Below graphs show the share of women in executive positions in public companies.

### Executive directors in RS Public companies

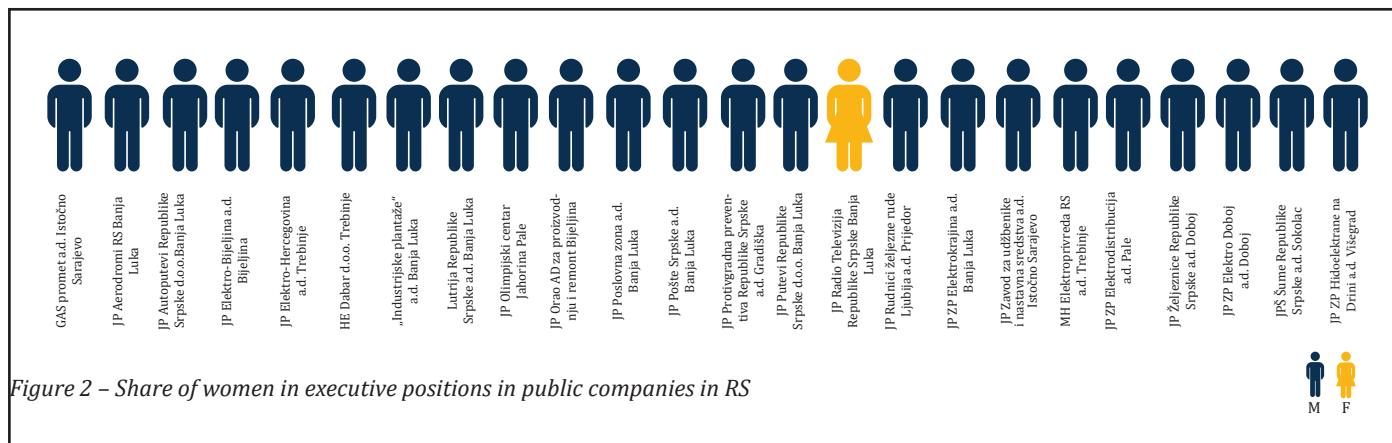


Figure 2 – Share of women in executive positions in public companies in RS

### Executive directors in the FBiH public companies

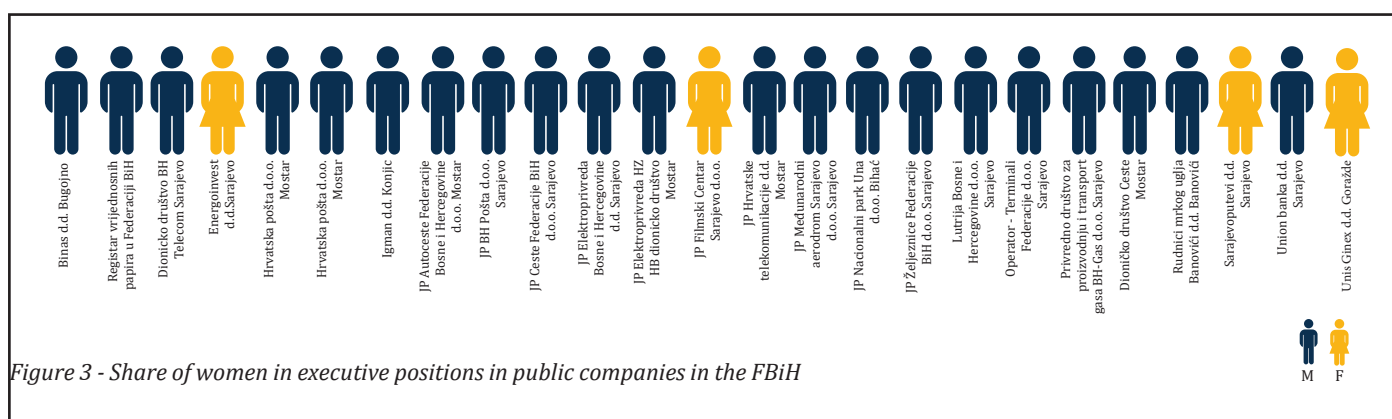
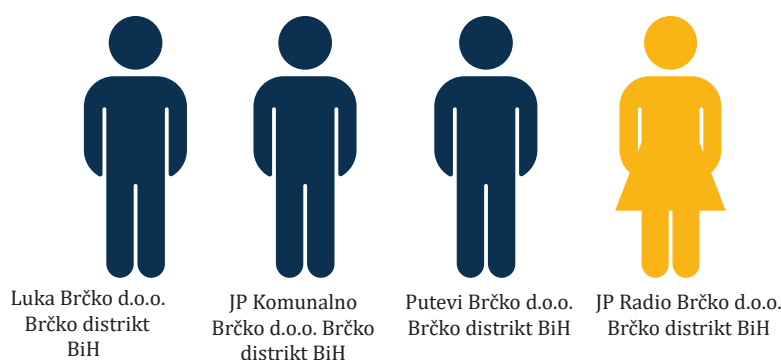


Figure 3 - Share of women in executive positions in public companies in the FBiH

### Executive directors in the BD public companies

Figure 4:  
Share of women in executive positions in the Brčko District public companies

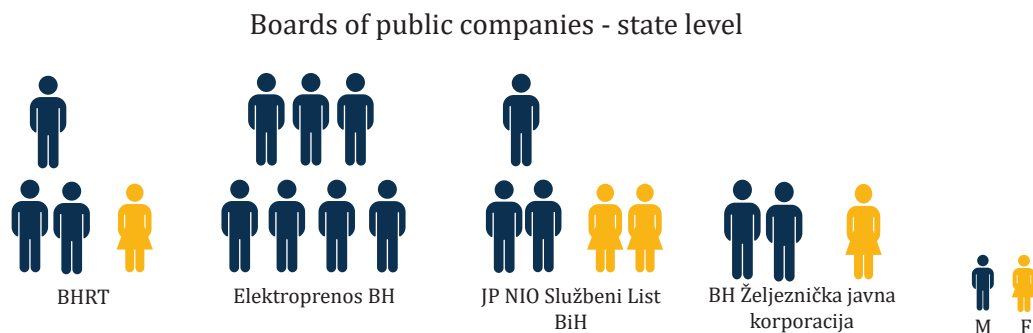


78 Women in Business and Management, The business case for change, May, 2019, Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) International Labor Office



Figure 5:

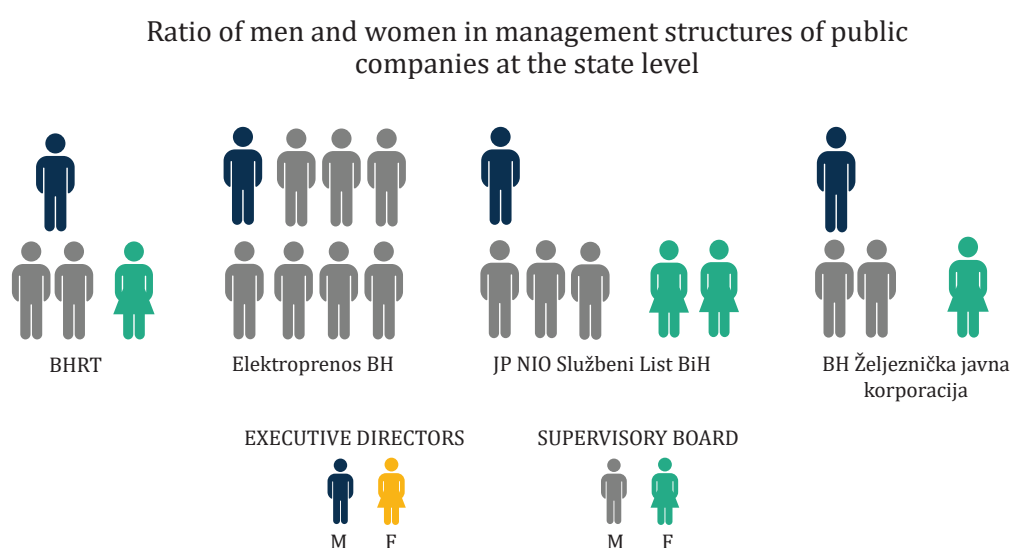
Share of women on boards of the state-level public companies



The situation is somewhat better with the representation of women on the boards of public companies<sup>79</sup>, but it is still far from the percentage stipulated under the GEL. Out of the total number of board members in all four companies owned by BiH, women are represented by about 26%. Only in one of the four public companies, women account for 40% of board membership, while this percentage in other companies is 34% and 25% and in one of the companies, there are no women on the public company board.

Figure 6:

Share of women executive directors and board members at the state level



Looking at Figure 6, which represents the share of women and men in both analyzed categories, we see that one company at the state level has no women in the position of managing director or board member, which means that in this company women are completely excluded from making all important decisions.

The trend of underrepresentation of women on boards also continues in the public companies from BD, FBiH and RS. Of the four public companies owned by Brčko District, two have on their boards one woman each, i.e., 10.5%. In the other two, women are not at all represented in the places of economic decision-making, which can be seen in Figure 8. **The representation of women in the boards of the analyzed companies from the FBiH and RS is 22.5% and 15% respectively.**

It is a staggering fact that out of 50% of public companies from the FBiH, there are 10 in which there are no women on the boards. The research conducted by the UNSA School of Economics<sup>80</sup> suggests that out of 42 analyzed public companies owned by the FBiH, 15 have no women on their boards. This reaffirms the fact that women are almost excluded from the decision-making process that takes place on the boards of public companies.

The situation is exactly the same in the analyzed companies from the RS, where out of 24 public companies observed, 10 have no women on their boards, just as in the FBiH. Interestingly, in only two of the 54 analyzed companies, women as board members outnumbered men. Both of these companies are from the FBiH.

<sup>79</sup> Management or supervisory boards were analyzed, depending on the organizational structure of the company

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Figure 7:

Share of women board members in the public companies in BD

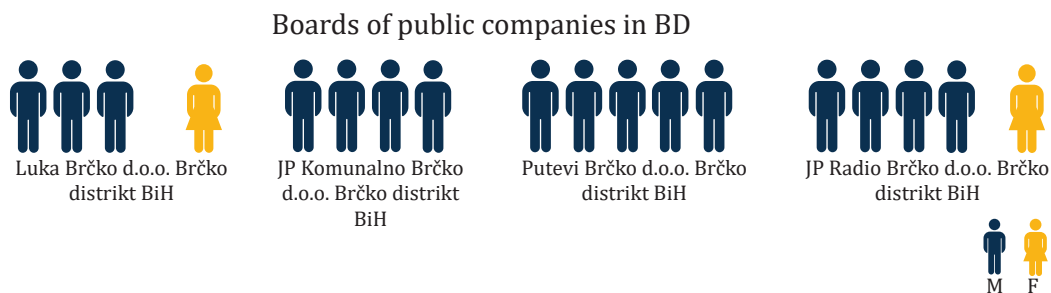


Figure 8:

Share of women executive directors and board members in public companies in Brčko District.

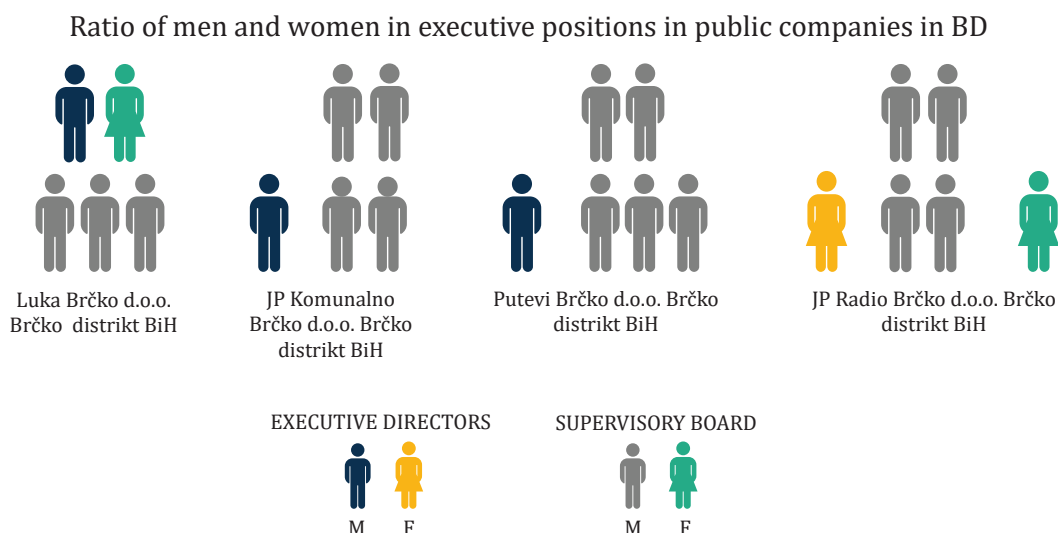


Figure 9:

Share of women board members in public companies in the Federation

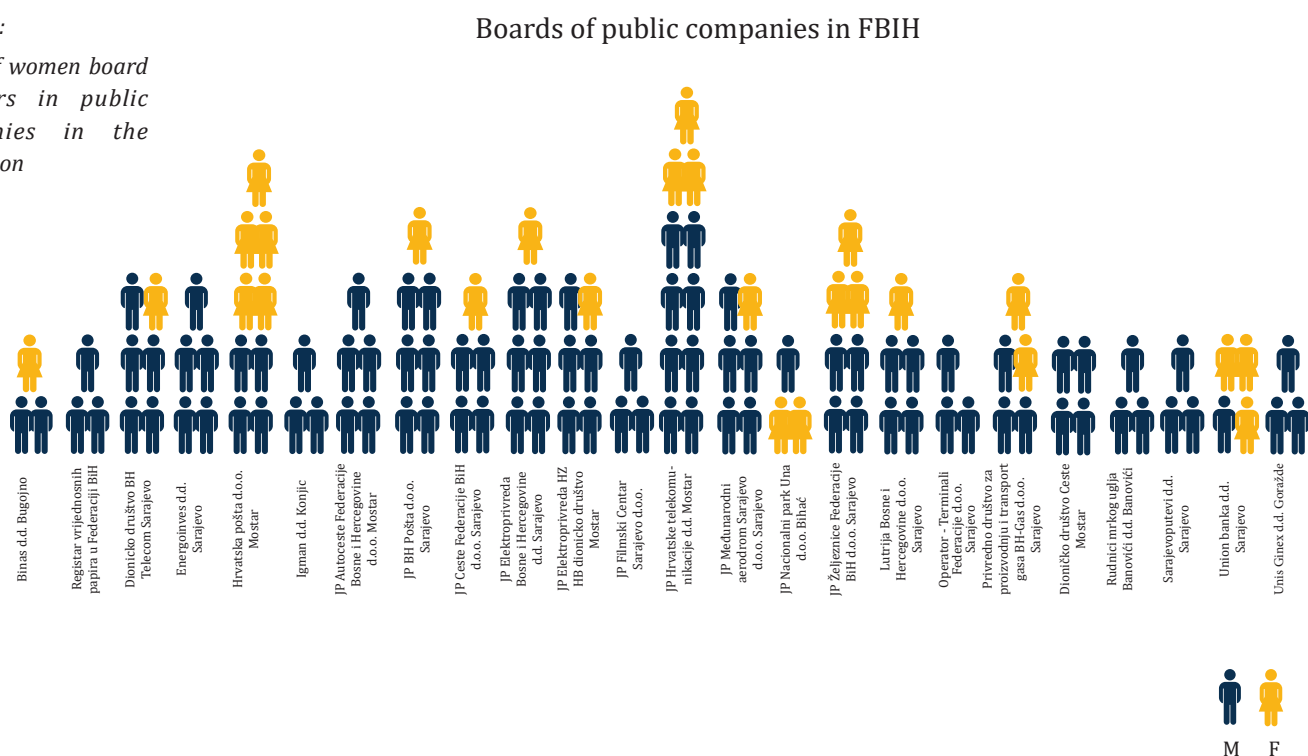
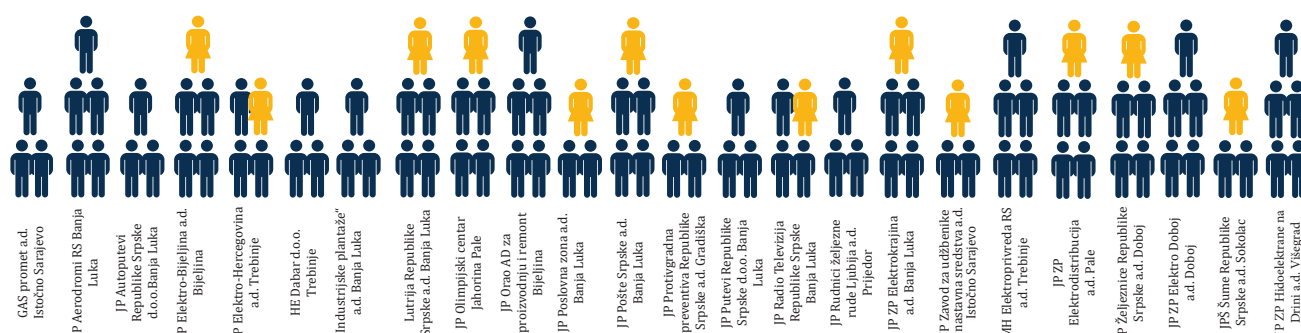


Figure 10:

Share of women board members in the public companies in the RS

## Boards of public companies in RS



The analysis of aggregate data on directors and members of the boards of public companies from the FBiH showed that the boards of companies headed by a man have, in most cases, a smaller number of women, whereas the boards of the companies headed by a woman comprise men only.

Public companies owned by RS and BD have similar results. Companies headed by a woman have in their boards one woman only, while the companies headed by men have in their boards mostly men.

*“Where there is money, there are no women. When one analyzes the representation in the boards of institutions, such as schools, theaters and the like where the work does not come with a fee, women prevail, while men dominate in the boards that come with a fee. Political influence, political participation of women is directly related to appointments to positions of economic power in public companies and other positions.”*

*Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić,  
Director of the BiH Gender Equality Agency*

The 2014 research conducted by the BiH Agency for Gender Equality<sup>81</sup> on a sample of 70 companies from the territory of BiH showed that the representation of women in executive and supervisory boards averages 13.35%. The research showed that about 10% of women (5.9% in FBiH and 15.6% in RS) managed to reach the position of chair of the board. Although this research did not refer to the public companies subject of this analysis, a parallel can be drawn and, unfortunately, it can be concluded that the situation has not changed much after six years. Women are still underrepresented in the positions of economic decision-making, and a macho culture still predominates in BiH companies.

Also, looking at the diagrams with aggregate data, we see companies with no women in any of the two analyzed categories (managing directors and board members). In FBiH, this is the situation in 6 companies, i.e., 25% of the total analyzed companies. In the RS, there are 10 i.e., 41.6% of such companies.

<sup>81</sup> Analysis of data from the research “Representation of men and women in the bodies of the 100 most successful business entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Data obtained from GEL.

Figure 11:

Share of women executive directors and board members of public companies in the FBiH

Ratio of men and women in executive structures of public companies in the FBiH

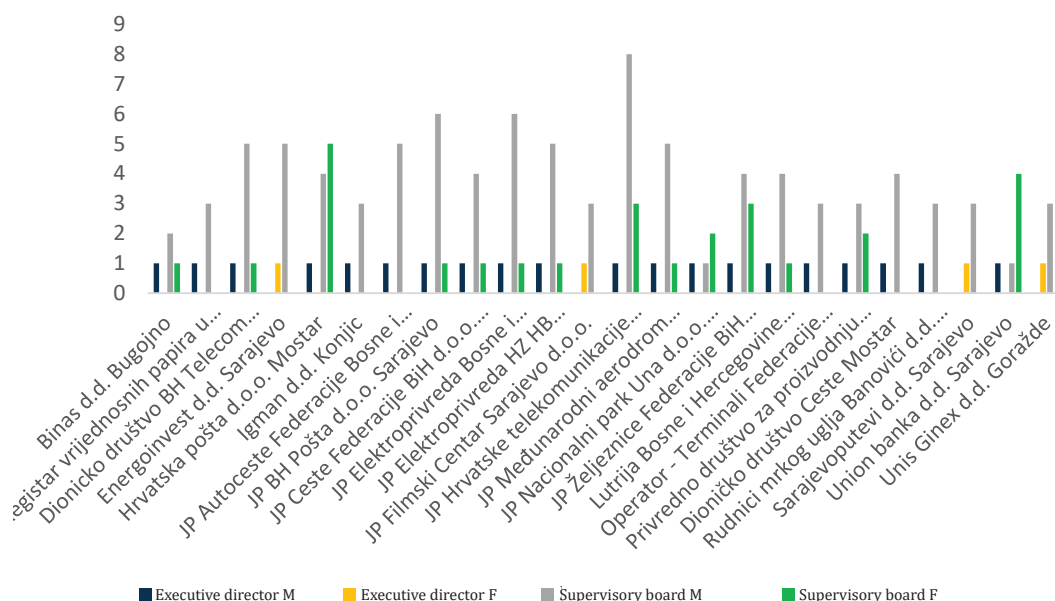
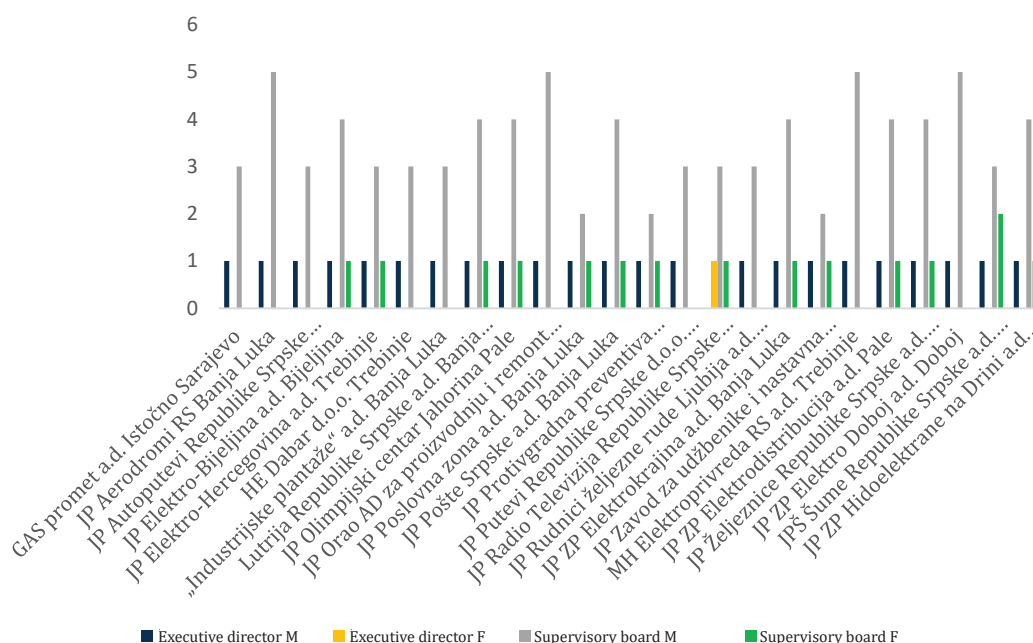


Figure 12:

Share of women executive directors and board members of public companies in the RS

Ratio of men and women in executive structures in public companies in RS



As we can see from the presented data, men make up most of the management structure of public companies. The main obstacles to greater representation and competitiveness of women in the business world are primarily traditional values and prejudices, the influence of (male-dominated) politics, and the sociological attitudes of persons appointing people to important positions and non-compliance with legislation.

According to the latest census, women make up 50.9% of the population<sup>82</sup>. The BiH Agency for Statistics (BHAS) periodically publishes reports on employment by activity, and according to the latest data<sup>83</sup> published in August 2021, the number of employed

82 [https://www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/doc/RezultatiPopisa\\_BS.pdf](https://www.popis.gov.ba/popis2013/doc/RezultatiPopisa_BS.pdf)

83 Data available on the website of the Agency for Statistics of BiH, at the link: <https://bhas.gov.ba/data/>

persons in BiH was 818,459, of which about 43.3% were women. A higher percentage of men are employed in all categorized activities. Most women are employed in wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing and education. Also, the Agency publishes the Labor Force Survey, and according to the data from the first quarter covering the period from January to March 2021<sup>84</sup> the activity rate of men is 59.2% while the activity rate of women is 36.2%. The male employment rate is 50%, while the female employment rate is 27.3%. On the other hand, the data on the number of persons with university degree qualifications is in favor of women. According to the data of the BiH Agency for Statistics, 12,705 students graduated in 2020<sup>85</sup>, of which 60.2% are women. Since 2014, there has been a noticeable trend in the number of women graduating, specializing or obtaining a master's degree relative to men<sup>86</sup>. These data also show that in BiH there is an invisible barrier built on prejudices and male-dominated culture in companies, which closes the way for women to the highest executive positions, despite their education qualifications. This was also confirmed by the respondents who were interviewed in the part of qualitative analysis.

*"We call it "a briefcase and a bow tie" They drive jeeps, carry briefcases, wear bow ties and develop the macho culture, especially in some sectors such as banking, economics and marketing, etc. They like to develop that style and to bond with one another, playing tennis and football together, always creating some teams. I see it less often with women, but with men leaders it is a mass phenomenon. Women mostly go to team-building events, cooperate in activities and projects, and occasionally attend gatherings. I think that men do it not only for business agreements and recreation, but also to have that macho club where women have no place."*

Samra Lučkin,  
Director of BORAM Agency

The study "The impact of gender division of family and house chores on the professional life of employed women in Bosnia and Herzegovina" provides important data that can, in part, explain why there is a generally lower percentage of employed women and women in executive positions.<sup>87</sup> Data from this study show that in 93.8% of relationships all or most of the house chores are done by women. When it comes to caring for children, again woman does all or most of the work, more precisely in as many as 80.8% of surveyed couples women take care of children. This research pointed to the fact that 67% of women when confronted with a choice between work and family, almost always and more often give preference to family. Also, the research showed that highly educated women were more often than others in a situation where they had to choose between work and family obligations.

"Women in business" is another interesting study that was conducted as part of the "100 largest" projects in BiH<sup>88</sup>, which reports significantly fewer women in decision-making and economic decision-making positions. The survey involved 642 respondents from the most successful companies in BiH. Surveyed were 420 (65.4%) persons who hold executive positions in their companies and 222 (34.6%) persons who do not perform managerial functions. The data showed that 79% of respondents believe that women in the business world have to work much harder than men. As many as 74.2% of respondents believe that there is some discrimination against women in the business environment.

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[Publikacije/Saopštenja/2021/LAB\\_02\\_2021\\_08\\_1\\_BS.pdf](#)

84 Data available at the link: [https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2021/LAB\\_00\\_2021\\_Q1\\_1\\_BS.pdf](https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2021/LAB_00_2021_Q1_1_BS.pdf)

85 Data available at the link: [https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2021/EDU\\_05\\_2020\\_Y2\\_1\\_BS.pdf](https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2021/EDU_05_2020_Y2_1_BS.pdf)

86 Publication "Women and Men in BiH", Statistics Agency of BiH, which includes data from various statistical and other fields disaggregated by gender. The data give a brief overview of the position of women and men in BiH society.

87 The survey was conducted by the Agency for Gender Equality in 2020.

88 The research is an annual report on the successful operation of the domestic economy, and is jointly conducted by: Poslovne novine and LRC, the leading credit rating agency in our country, in co-organization with the Foreign Trade Chamber of BiH, and in partnership with Addiko Bank and Euroexpress express mail.

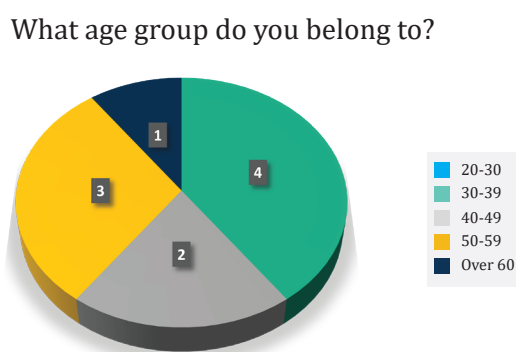


## Starting positions

The questionnaire was delivered to a total of thirty-eight (38) respondents<sup>89</sup>, and ten (10) answered the questionnaire. Responses to the questionnaire were provided anonymously via the Google Form.

Respondents belong to different age groups, with most of them (4) falling into the age group 30-39. This data may mean that women from this age group have recently gained enough knowledge and experience to come to leadership positions and want their voice to be heard, want change and are more willing to participate in research. The same data were collected in a survey conducted by the UNSA School of Economics<sup>90</sup> investigating the representation of women in public companies from FBiH. Their sample was bigger, but they came to the same result - the largest percentage of respondents who answered the questionnaire falls to the age group 30-39. Also, in the research conducted by the School of Economics, no respondent belonged to the age group 20-29, which is the case in this research as well. This finding makes sense because, in addition to a certain level of education, the executive position requires also relevant work experience, which the vast majority of people from this age group could not have gained.

Figure 13:  
Age group of  
respondents



Eight (8) respondents were married. Two (2), who are unmarried, have no children, while the married respondents have children: four (4) respondents have two, three (3) have one, while one (1) respondent has three children. This data tells us that most of the respondents managed to reconcile their professional and private life in order to advance in their careers.

<sup>89</sup> The questionnaire was sent to the e-mail addresses of all women holding executive position or sitting on the boards of the analyzed public companies for whom we received contacts.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Figure 14:  
Marital status

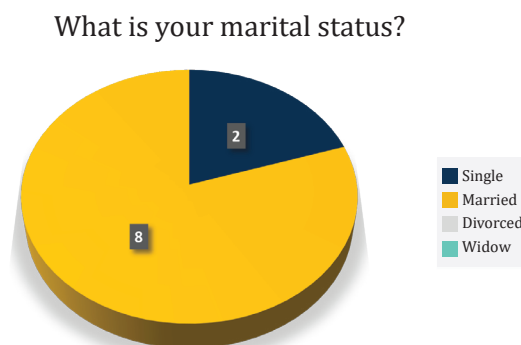
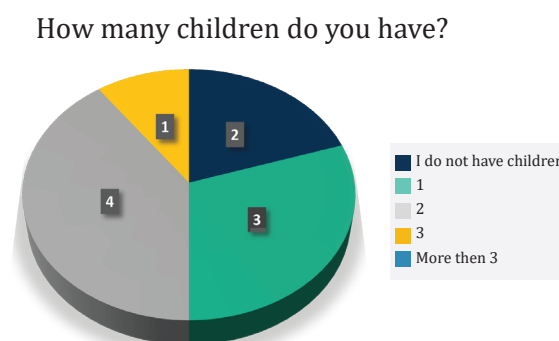
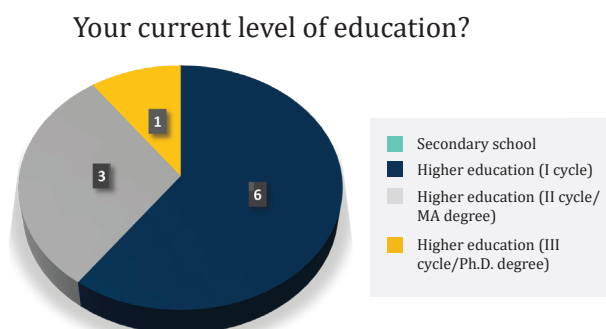


Figure 15:  
Number of children



Looking at the level of education, the largest number of respondents (as many as 6) completed the first cycle of higher education. Three respondents have completed the second cycle of higher education, and one (1) respondent has completed the third cycle of higher education and obtained the title of DSc. These data correspond with the data of the Statistics Agency, which show that the majority of highly educated women most often complete the first and second degree of higher education, and percentage-wise they outnumber men.

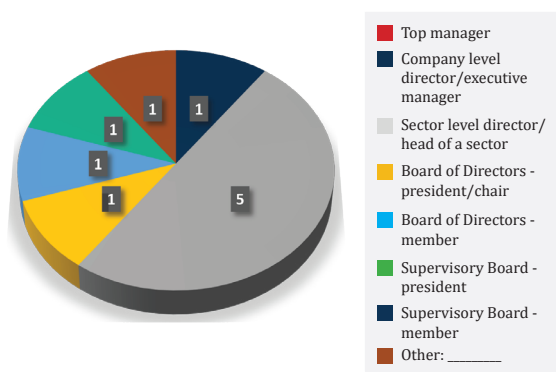
Figure 16:  
Level of education



According to the current management structures in the public companies, most respondents (5) hold positions of sector heads. As many as four (4) are members of management/supervisory or audit boards, and only one (1) holds the position of a managing director of the company.

Figure 17:  
Current position of the  
respondent in public  
company

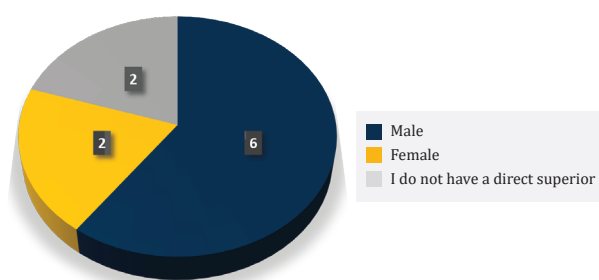
What is your current position in the company?



When asked – *If you answer directly to another person, what sex is that person?* - six (6) respondents claim to respond to man, while only two (2) said to answer to woman. Two (2) respondents claim not to have a superior above them. One of them is the executive director of the company, and the other is the chair of the board of directors. These data correspond with the data obtained from the analysis of director positions in public companies at the state, Entity and BD levels, which confirm the fact that women are underrepresented in senior executive positions in public companies.

Figure 18:  
Sex of the respondent's  
superior

In case you answer directly to another person, what sex is that person?



According to respondents, the most frequent obstacle to having women in executive positions is the stereotypical opinion that women and men in executive positions have different leadership styles and that men are more authoritative, while women are less effective in those positions. Women also hesitate to apply for executive positions due to a lack of motivation and/or courage. Another difficulty mentioned is the reconciliation of family and business life, and the lack of support from family, as well as from male colleagues at work.

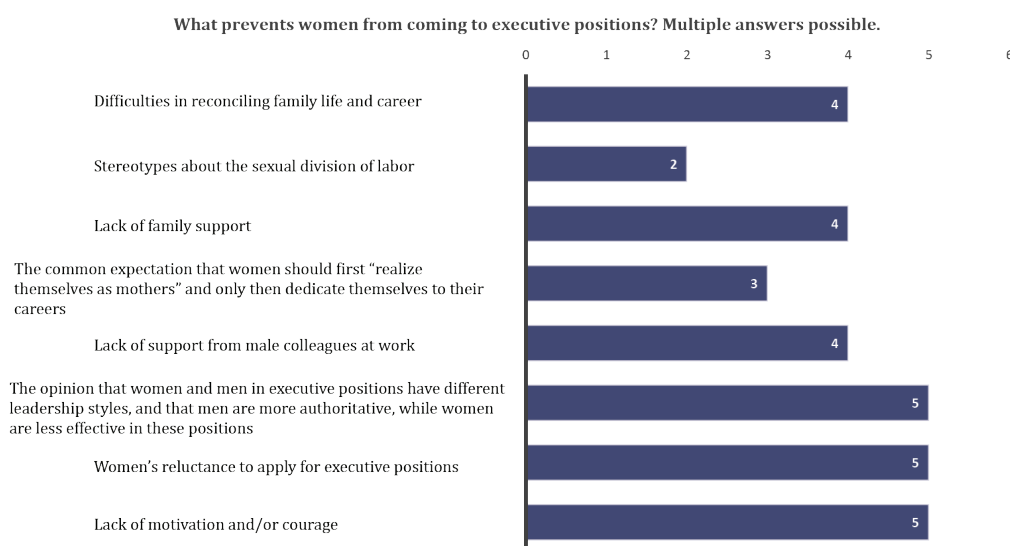
The data confirm the data from the research of the Agency for Gender Equality according to which in 93.8% of relationships, all or most household chores are performed by women, and in 80.8% of surveyed couples, women take care of children. Another confirmation that supports these data comes from the study "100 Largest in BiH"<sup>91</sup> where as many as 53.4% of respondents said that striking balance between career and family is the most common problem for professional advancement, closely followed by the lack of support from colleagues.

*“Women are forced to be organizationally capable. In addition to what they do at home - cleaning, caring for children, helping with their homework, cooking - they need to fit their professional ambition somewhere. That is why women have the ability to focus on what is important and plan their work well in order to save time. Women have a lot more responsibilities than men, and when they take some position they tend to act with a care of a prudent businessman and are better organized. Of course, one should not generalize. I speak from my own experience, and the experience of women from my surrounding.”*

*Ines Tanović,  
Director of the Sarajevo Film Center*

Figure 19:

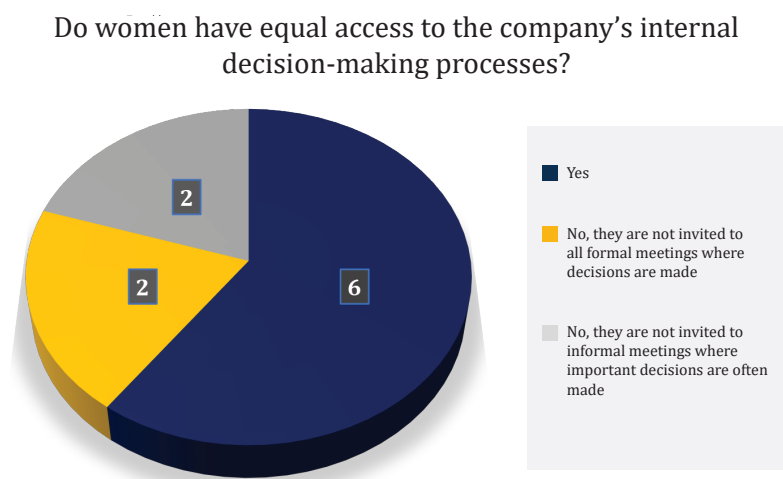
*Respondents' opinions  
on what prevents  
women from coming to  
executive positions*



Most of the respondents (6) believe that women have equal access to internal decision-making processes in the company, while the remaining 4 respondents feel otherwise - two (2) because they are not invited to all formal meetings where decisions are made, and two (2) because decisions are made in informal meetings which they do not attend.

Figure 20:

*Respondents' opinions  
on whether women  
have equal access  
to internal decision-  
making processes*



*Women who first broke through the barriers had to first change themselves, stereotypes and patriarchal upbringing patterns and only then influence the surrounding. Generally, the situation is much better now, at least when it comes to the real sector because I can only talk about the real sector. I hope that in the time to come our colleagues who are now arriving on the labor market will have the ambiance we have long wanted.*

*Suzana Tihi Babić,*

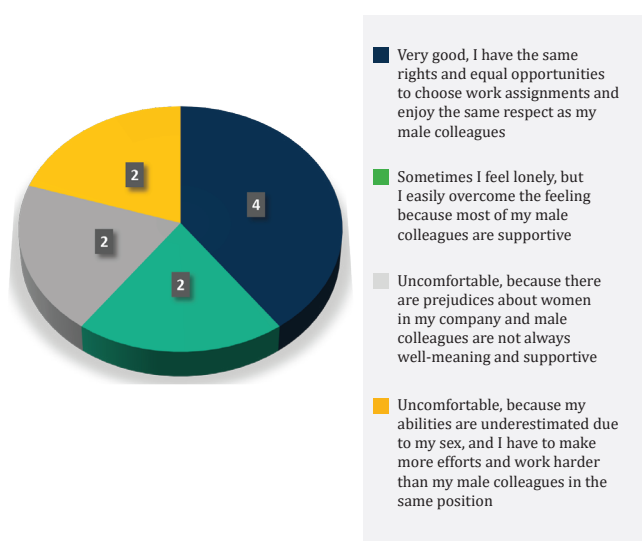
*Director of the Human Resources Management Department of Addiko Bank*

When asked: “How does it feel to be a woman in an executive position in a business environment?” more than half of the respondents said it feels very good because they have the same rights and equal opportunities to choose work tasks and enjoy the same respect as male colleagues in the same positions. Some said they sometimes feel lonely but easily overcome the feeling because most male colleagues are supportive.

On the other hand, slightly less than half (4) feel uncomfortable because there are prejudices about women in their companies and their male colleagues are not always well-meaning and supportive, and their abilities are underestimated due to their sex, hence they need to work harder than male colleagues in the same position. This was also confirmed by respondents coming from other sectors.

Figure 21:  
How does it feel for  
respondents to be in  
executive positions

How does it feel to be a woman in an executive position in a business environment?

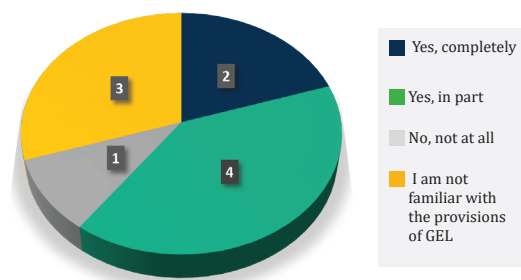


Interestingly, three (3) out of ten (10) respondents are not familiar with the provisions of the Gender Equality Law stipulating a mandatory quota of 40% when appointing to executive positions within the company. Given the sample size, this is a fairly large share of respondents. Also worrying is the fact that five (5) respondents said that the GEL was partially or not at all complied with when appointing people to executive positions. In the end, these data correspond with the data obtained from the analysis of the representation of women in the positions of managing directors and board members of public companies, but also with the data of other relevant research.



Figure 22:  
Familiarity with the  
Gender Equality Law  
of BiH

To your knowledge, does your company comply with the provisions of the Gender Equality Law in BiH (GEL) when appointing people to executive positions?



*"All public companies and institutions shall have regulations aligned with the GEL and all persons in executive positions are required to familiarize themselves with the laws they are obliged to apply and with which their legal acts are ought to be aligned and implemented."*

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić,  
Director of the BiH Gender Equality Agency

Some of the respondents shared the challenges they encountered in their careers:

- Being passed over by male colleagues, as they are God-given. There is still a lot of chauvinism, but I'm holding firm.
- I don't have any unpleasant experiences. I applied for the position and was selected;
- On several occasions, due to the influence of politics and the men's lobby, I've been in the last minute passed over for a job by a man, under the pretext that the job is too stressful for a mother of two;
- When I advance in my career it is always associated with me not being married and being in a relationship with someone who helps me climb up the ladder, and never with my abilities and qualifications;
- I had to know more and work three times harder than my male colleagues.

Some respondents added their personal opinions about women in the business world:

- Women in the business world are trying to fit into a system that men have created for themselves, instead of building a support network with women and building a system that suits them. It is a more difficult path, but it is the only way to ensure more women in the system and to make it sustainable in the long run;
- Women are appointed only to positions in which one needs to do the heavy lifting;
- The major problem for women in business is that they don't support each other as men do;
- In 90% of cases, the parties put to public company executive positions suitable male staff with little or no knowledge, with diplomas obtained in a very dubious way, which serve only to meet the formal requirements of the competition and nothing more. These people are very dangerous for this economy. Women find it difficult to come to these positions even though they have both the knowledge and experience and the ability.

According to the respondents' comments, but also based on interviews conducted with women in executive positions, it can be concluded that women in the business world primarily lack greater support from other women. Women in executive positions are more educated and competent than their male counterparts because in most cases they are promoted based on merits, while men more often come to executive positions thanks to their political engagement.

*"My personal experience as the director of an institution with a mandate based on the GEL to advocate for gender equality is that thanks to knowledge in this area and good argumentation during the discussions I have unusually good experience in communicating with colleagues from various institutions and parliamentary committees with which I regularly cooperate."*

*Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić,  
Director of the BiH Gender Equality Agency*

## Experiences and perceptions

The aim of the qualitative analysis is primarily to identify barriers faced by women in executive positions in three sectors: public, private and banking. Important data obtained through interviews with respondents confirm not only the findings of the quantitative analysis but also the findings of other studies speaking about women being indeed underrepresented (sometimes even excluded from) in executive positions where important economic decisions are made. In addition to confirming the quantitative findings, the qualitative analysis made it possible to obtain the opinions and attitudes of successful women from different sectors and industries on the positive and negative factors that affect women's career advancement.

### *Stereotypes and prejudices*

During the first part of the interview, "Starting positions ", the respondents talked about their experiences, but also the experiences of women from their business and private environment, about access to information and resources for promotion and management support. All respondents agree that women and men do not have the same opportunities for promotion.

They think that the situation is better than before, but it is still not good enough:

*"Having heard the question, I can tell you right away that the situation is getting better and better. Lately, both women and men have had the same opportunities. If you had asked me this same question a couple of years ago, the answer certainly would not have been like this. Many of us hit our heads on that glass ceiling, that's my experience. "*

*"Formally, yes. Informally, there are probably differences because there is a "male circle" that is still stronger than the "female circle."*


All respondents also agreed that the support of senior management is key to promotion:

*"If senior management decides on jobs and promotion of employees then, of course, it matters. Those at lower levels receive signals from the senior management on how to behave, whether someone can be promoted or not. These signals impact the motivation of employees to work harder to get promoted."*

*"It is not only important, but it is also key to promotion."*

*"The support of senior management, i.e., management is of great importance. Having that kind of support says a lot about your organizational structure. You are creating an organizational structure that supports diversity and equal rights for all. The right to thrive, to learn and have equal pay for the same job. And this is where the management plays an immensely important role. They are the ones who create the organizational structure and ultimately decide on what will happen."*

The questions in the second part of the interview - Experiences and Perceptions - were mostly about the opinions and experiences of respondents on different leadership styles of men and women, on how difficult it is to be a successful woman in BiH society, the support women provide to each other, the extent to which family obligations affect a woman's career, the macho culture and positive and negative factors impacting a woman's career.



Respondents tend to believe that women's leadership styles are empathetic and that women care more about employee satisfaction than men. They also believe that women due to their ability to multi-task are good at balancing their work and life obligations:

*"Men think differently. They address problems step by step, not looking at the lessons learned in the past nor will they think about what is happening now and what's the employee's situation. They will come, solve the problem and move on. Women will take account of many things, especially when they have other women in front of them who also must consider many things. That's the way we are, the way we think and act. This is why teams led by women are far more pleased with work. They receive more understanding and more attention."*

*"Sometimes I wish to have a bit of the male leadership in me because they simplify everything and make a lot of black and white decisions and have black and white directions. We women are always in a gray zone, incorporating the emotional component in everything we do. We are more empathetic, which sometimes makes things difficult. That's what I think makes our leadership styles different."*

In BiH, as in most Balkan countries, patriarchal values dominate, and thus there are many stereotypes related to the division of men's and women's jobs and family responsibilities. These stereotypes and expectations are often a problem for women in building a career. Talking about how difficult it is to be a woman in executive position in BiH, respondents were largely in agreement:

*"It is absolutely difficult and I think it is gender-based because before they see me as an interlocutor on an important topic, they first see me as a woman."*

*"Definitely. It takes a lot more work, effort, and commitment, as well as multitasking to succeed as a manager."*

They spoke similarly about how BiH society perceives a career-focused woman:

*"There is a lot of stigmas. Here a woman must want to be married, to have children, to cook well, and do other house chores. Having a little bit of career along with all the mentioned is fine, but the career must never affect the above-mentioned. A woman who is committed to her career is certainly stigmatized in BiH society."*

*"I think there is a lot of abhorring towards these women, especially if they have no family of their own or if they decided not to have one. These women are in some ways stigmatized for putting work first, not what is biologically destined for them. In fact, they are not treated the same as men in a similar position, because when a man does that, it is completely normal and expected."*

Society is full of stereotypes and prejudices and it is one segment that makes it difficult for women to advance in their careers. In addition to social norms, family support, division of family responsibilities and child care play a very important, perhaps the most important, role for a woman's successful business career. Respondents had very uniform and specific opinions and attitudes about the division of family responsibilities and how important it is for career advancement:

*"I think women are, in fact, hostages to their relationships. In my view, no correlation should be made between women's careers and their spouses or partners and their willingness to help and devote more time to family. I don't think that men should assume responsibility for everything, but they should have the same, exactly the same obligations towards*

*family as women."*

*"In my case, we divided the roles at the very start, so for me, this was not a hurdle. The only thing I had to do was give birth and breastfeed and stay with the baby for that period. It was a wonderful period for me. I advocate that a woman should be freed of work during that period unless they want to work. So, if a woman decides for herself, and for some reason she wants to start working after a short period... I think that employers must be very careful and provide all possible support to women in these first moments with children."*

*"I think that women create their own microworlds, one is a family, one is a job and so on, and then we fit it all together somehow. For women to succeed in their careers, they must set boundaries in the family. Family support is important."*

### ***Patriarchal upbringing and a woman's career***

The greater number of responsibilities that women have in the family stem not only from patriarchal upbringing but also from long-term economic dependence and inequality in the pay of women and men. Not being able to advance and be promoted to higher and better-paid positions, women compensate for this balance by doing home chores and raising children.

*"I think that the differences are primarily due to financial inequality. If a woman has a good salary, if she is financially independent, she can lead her life and act and work according to her needs. Women are always hostages of relationships where men earn more and thus dictate how long a woman can be absent from family activities. For me, it is absolutely inadmissible for someone else to decide whether I can do something or not. I think there should be an agreement, and the family should support building a career. "Unfortunately, in our country, women are always underpaid, earn less and are therefore hostages of these relationships."*


*"Women's economic power and independence is key to strengthening their position in society as well as political participation. But due to the burden of caring for the immediate and extended family, women objectively do not have time to become more involved in political activities, and thus lose the opportunity to be appointed to economic positions of power."*

Stereotypes about male and female roles in society and family obligations are not limited to men, a large number of women have the same opinion and because of traditional upbringing have internal struggles to justify their need for career advancement. The pressure they feel from society but also from themselves often puts them in a position where they do not know how to be quality support to each other. When it comes to women supporting each other in their career paths, respondents' experiences vary, hence they cannot be generalized. In addition to the support that women have within their families, the support of the environment, especially women, is also very important.

*"Somehow I have a feeling that women are always more jealous of other women than men and that they help each other less. Sometimes one gets more support from men than from women. I'm talking about women from patriarchal backgrounds, those who out of their own inability to move out of those relationships envy other women who manage to break away from that patriarchal matrix. We often see more intolerance among women than men."*

*"Women often talk about support and women's solidarity, but I don't see that support. When you have women competing with one another for a job, then I can understand that*





*there is no support. I am very supportive and employ young people, mostly young women who have just graduated from college. I invest in these women and teach them business. For years, I have been investing my knowledge and skills so that these young women can do the job on their own. That way I gain the loyalty of my employees. Many women won't do that. They don't want to invest in other women that way."*

*"I would say that this is happening more and more often, and we realized how important it is to support each other. There are different experiences, I have one bad experience but it is wrong to generalize and say that women do not support each other. I think we need to work on that and promote how women should support women. I think there is a special place in hell for women who do not support women."*

The traditional society and having predominantly men occupy executive and other important economic decision-making positions have created the so-called macho culture in BiH companies. For a long time, women have been trying to make a change in these patterns with their knowledge and skills, but it is going very slowly. Very often, women are being degraded because of these "macho" rules.

*"Of course, there is a 'macho' culture. I worked in a public company where I was the only woman in the sector. The managing director and sector manager below him never allowed me to get promoted, they did not let me do the work and ultimately, they fired me solely because I am a woman. My male colleague who did the identical work, and who acted in the same manner as I did was rewarded and I was fired."*

*"In the business world today, men have a hard time coping with women because we have become very eloquent and strong, we know what we want and we have no problem saying that. Most of us don't have anything to hide and therefore we have no problem speaking our minds. When a woman is competing with a man for a job, managers will always hire a man who is more similar to him and fits into these groups for tennis, football, etc."*

Even though most companies still have this so-called male culture, women manage to win their positions and are very successful in the jobs they do. The respondents also spoke about positive and negative factors that affect a woman's career:

*"First of all, women are very committed to their jobs, especially when they see results. Seeing that she has succeeded in pushing her ideas and projects despite the bad atmosphere around her, and despite all hurdles, gives a woman satisfaction and strength to fight."*

*"Negative impacts come from our tradition and everything bad and primitive in the tradition, a lot of prejudice, which are standing in the way. Families and society, the narrower and wider social group that tells you straight away that it is not for women. These are the families in which larger pieces of meat are kept for men. It is something that prevents a young person from going further and thriving without restrictions. The media can have a negative impact by showing content that places women in certain boxes."*

Interestingly, in addition to good quality education and personal ambitions, respondents mentioned successful women from their families who were their role models and positive factors that impacted their advancement:

*"Role models have a positive effect if there are any in the family. If you have grandmothers, mothers, aunts, who have their own careers and who are focused on education and development, and are generally open-minded persons, it is something that is positive."*

### *Power and influence of politics*

In the third part of the interview - The Power and Influence of Politics, respondents shared their experiences of whether men and women mind when a woman is their superior:

*"I think it does bother them, especially at the beginning. If you manage to prove yourself as a capable person who knows what she is doing then those boundaries are gradually erased. It takes time to establish a relationship of trust, but after that, it works. If people are honest, they'll recognize that you are doing something good and that you have good ideas, one simply has to impose oneself as a good leader."*

*"I think that men like women's sensibility, but when their superior points out omissions and mistakes in their work, then there is a problem. A large number of women perceive male leaders as a greater authority in the business than female leaders."*

*"Older generations still have a problem, younger ones don't. In our bank, we are balanced, and women make up the majority of our management structure. This means that my female directors are superior to the male directors of the sectors and no one has a problem with that. It is a true pleasure working with such women leaders and something new can be learned from them every day. But when I go back a little bit, I think that the problem was with the older generations, especially those with more traditional upbringing: I remember one of my colleagues who would in his speech referred to me as "ženska glavo" [you woman's head] and I know exactly where he was coming from, so I would immediately draw his attention to him not to call me that. These were the people you had to correct on a daily basis, and such a profile of a colleague is not happy to have a female boss."*

*"In my experience, sometimes it is easier to get support for certain issues from men than from women. "Some women accept male dominance in decision-making and are not ready to express their opinion and advocate for gender equality publicly, believing that this will jeopardize their position."*

One of the respondents shared her personal experience:

*"For almost two years now, I have been facing sabotage by both women and men. Women sabotage me because I put the things in order, saying what can and cannot be done, and men sabotage me because some lost their positions. I experience sabotage because as a woman I have shown that very little effort a lot can be achieved. This has to do with our Balkan way of thinking, where a job in a state-owned company is perceived as God-given, where you receive a salary for doing nothing. They are not aware that we need to build something positive to keep the operations on the positive side of the balance sheet."*

Politics influence appointments in public companies only. Private and banking sectors operate on a different principle and decisions are made, mostly by the owners and the team of managers in the private sector, and the board of directors in the banking sector.

*"There are women in private companies because interest prevails, so it is easier for women to penetrate, although stereotypes are present here as well."*

*"Politics has an impact on the industry, but it has no impact on our operations and the way the group functions. At the group level, we have prescribed procedures and codes of conduct."*

In the public companies, the situation is different and politics has a great influence on



the selection of directors and board members (management/supervisory):

*“Art is valued against some other criteria. If you make a great film, no one can say that it is not great because it was made by a woman. You have solid proof that you have done a great job. When it comes to other industries, the problem could be that one has no opportunity to show what one knows. In art industry, one can be appointed executive of an institution such as theater, opera, ballet, art gallery, etc. These functions are occupied by people coming from political circles, and it is no longer one’s gender that matters, but the political affiliation. All this is decided by some other people, and women are in the background because it is not the quality but some other parameters that matter more.”*

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## CONCLUSIONS

Equal participation of women in economic decision-making processes in BiH is still a long way off.

The analyzed data showed no women holding the position of executive director of a public company at the state level. In the Brčko District, a woman is the head of only one of the four public companies. Of the companies participating in this research, women are executives in only 4% in RS i.e., 16.6% in the Federation of BiH. Out of the total number of board members in all four companies owned by BiH, women are represented by about 26%. On the boards of public companies in BD, women account for 10.5%. The situation is no better in the Entities either. Women account for 15% of board members in the RS public companies and 22.5% of board members in the FBiH public companies.

The analysis has shown that there are several reasons why women do not have equal opportunities for career advancement, and thus for appointment to executive positions in public companies.

BiH is still a very patriarchal society dominated by stereotypes about the strictly divided roles of men and women in all areas of life. The crucial role of women is thus to look after the family, as respondents explained.

Difficulties in reconciling family and business life, lack of support from both the family and the business environment and society as a whole are the barriers that stand in the way to women's professional advancement. As respondents pointed out, women who do not have a family and who strive to advance in their careers are not viewed favorably. On top of that, they lack support from other women, which is another major obstacle to their promotion in companies, because, as respondents indicated, this problem is not evident among male colleagues.

Decisions on appointments are said to be made in narrow male-dominated political circles, to which women have little access. Also, decisions are often made in informal gatherings outside working hours in which, again, women do not participate. The so-called 'macho' culture prevents women from being promoted or reduces their formal power in the decision-making places.

Men and women in public companies are not familiar or do not comply with the statutory gender equality obligations.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure full implementation of all laws at all levels of government in BiH.

Ensure implementation of the Gender Equality Law in BiH, specifically Article 20, which states that all state bodies, at all levels of organizations of authorities, and local self-government bodies, including legislative, executive and judicial authorities, political parties, legal persons with public authorities, legal persons that are owned or controlled by the state, entity, cantons, cities or municipalities or over whose work a public body exercises control, shall secure and promote equal gender representation in process of managing, decision making, and representation. Equal gender representation is deemed to exist when one of the sexes is represented with at least 40% in the bodies referred to herein.

Public companies must align their internal legal regulations with the provisions of all adopted laws as well as international instruments and good practices regarding promotion and appointment to executive positions.

Encourage career development mentoring for businesswomen to increase women's participation in executive positions using good private-sector practices.

Establish a regular system of collecting detailed statistics disaggregated by gender at all statistical offices, especially in the field of employment, salaries, and benefits, by individual sectors of employment, professional development and promotion, and participation in management and governance.

When drafting policies and laws in the areas of labor, employment and the social system, it is mandatory to assess the impact of these policies on the status of women. New policies must include a system of mandatory, regular monitoring and reporting on their implementation.

Labor and employment laws and policies must respond to the need for striking a balance between work and private life for parents and carers, and in particular to recognize the need to invest in childcare facilities and the like.



## **ANNEXES**

### **ANNEX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS**

### **ANNEX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## Questionnaire for women in executive positions

The questionnaire has been developed for the research conducted as part of the “Promoting Gender Equality through the EU Accession Process” project co-financed by the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

### 1. What age group do you belong to?

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

Over 60

### 2. What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Divorced

Widow

### 3. Your current level of education?

Secondary school

Higher education (I cycle)

Higher education (II cycle/ MA degree)

Higher education (III cycle/Ph.D. degree)

### 4. How many children do you have?

I do not have children

1

2

3

More than 3

**5. What is your current position in the company?**

Top manager

Company level director/executive manager

Sector level director/head of a sector

Board of Directors - president/chair

Board of Directors - member

Supervisory Board - president

Supervisory Board - member

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. In case you answer directly to another person, what sex is that person?**

Female

Male

I do not have a direct superior

**7. What prevents women from coming to executive positions? Multiple answers possible.**

Difficulties in reconciling family life and career

Stereotypes about the sexual division of labor

Lack of family support

The common expectation that women should first “realize themselves as mothers” and only then dedicate themselves to their careers

Lack of support from male colleagues at work

The opinion that women and men in executive positions have different leadership styles, and that men are more authoritative, while women are less effective in these positions

Women’s reluctance to apply for executive positions

Lack of motivation and/or courage

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Do women have equal access to the company's internal decision-making processes?**

Yes

No, they are not invited to all formal meetings where decisions are made

No, they are not invited to informal meetings where important decisions are often made

**9. How does it feel to be a woman in an executive position in a business environment?**

Very good, I have the same rights and equal opportunities to choose work assignments and enjoy the same respect as my male colleagues

Sometimes I feel lonely, but I easily overcome the feeling because most of my male colleagues are supportive

Uncomfortable, because there are prejudices about women in my company and male colleagues are not always well-meaning and supportive

Uncomfortable, because my abilities are underestimated due to my sex, and I have to make more efforts and work harder than my male colleagues in the same position

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. To your knowledge, does your company comply with the provisions of the Gender Equality Law in BiH (GEL) when appointing people to executive positions?**

Yes, completely

Yes, in part

No, not at all

I am not familiar with the provisions of GEL

**11. If you wish, please briefly list some of the experiences/challenges that you encountered as a woman on your career path.**

**12. If you wish, please share any additional comments or information.**

**STARTING POSITIONS**

Are women given the same opportunities for promotion as men?

Do women have equal access to resources for promotion?

How important do you think the support of senior management is?

**EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS**

Do women and men differ in their leadership styles?

Is it difficult to be a woman in an executive position in BiH? Why?

How does BiH society perceive a successful career-focused businesswoman?

How do women's household responsibilities and family care affect a woman's career?

Is it difficult to balance between career and private life?

In your opinion, do women provide enough support to other women in their career development?

Are there macho cultures in BiH companies?

Which factors positively and negatively affect a woman's career?

**POWER AND INFLUENCE OF POLITICS**

In your experience, do men mind having a woman as the superior at work?

Do women mind having a woman superior at work?

In your experience, has your formal power in the executive position been questioned because of your sex?

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