

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED GENDER ROLES ON FEMALE POVERTY, THE CASE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the position of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in relation to their participation in the labor market, average income differences between men and women and causes that affect their situation in respect to social norms and perceived gender roles. Through identifying how harmful practices perpetuated by social norms contribute to increasing inequality that widens the poverty gender gap, the research discovers a high percentage of working-age women being outside the labor market, a higher unemployment rate among women, and gender disparity in occupations and positions in BiH. By surveying the perception of prevalent social norms, particularly those connected to roles the society 'assigns' to women and men, the study identifies linkages between the roles and the position of women in the labor market and decision-making. The special focus is on multidimensional aspects of poverty, particularly in cases of limited access to jobs, education, and public services.

Keywords: female poverty, female labor participation, social norms, gender roles, decision-making



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Introduction

Poverty, as defined by Paul Spicker (1999), consists of “serious deprivation” where people are poor when their “material circumstances are deemed to be morally unacceptable”. Multidimensional aspects of poverty assume the deprivation along three dimensions of well-being – monetary poverty, education, and basic infrastructure services (World Bank). Inequality between men and women, due to the widening gender gap in poverty, is often referred to as the feminization of poverty, female or gendered poverty. The term ‘feminization of poverty’ was coined by a social worker, Dr Diana Pearce, in 1978 (Hinze & Aliberti, 2007). The term received wider attention in the 1980s when studies on the proliferation of female-headed households and research on social impacts and gender-specific effects of structural adjustment policies became more prominent (Moghadam, 1998).

Unemployment is a main driver of poverty. However, women are less active in the labor market and unemployment among them is higher. Globally, in 2022, women’s labor force participation rate stood at 47.4 percent compared with 72.3 percent for men (ILO, 2022). BiH’s ratio is 40.6 percent to 61.7 percent in favor of men (ILOSTAT, 2022)¹. Apart from unemployment, one of the main reasons women are caught in the poverty cycle is that they occupy jobs that pay less and are mainly employed in industries and sectors with insufficient monetary power, which generates a gender pay gap.

The assumed gender roles restrict women’s access to education, public services, political participation, and many sectors of the workforce, particularly when it comes to women belonging to marginalized groups. The studies conducted in the United States (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2016) and the European Union (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016) show enormous differences when it comes to the proportion of minorities living under the poverty line in comparison to the majority population. However, the percentage of women living in poverty is higher across all population groups. Additional factors that affect women’s poverty are education level, family type – single female-headed households with children being most vulnerable, lower earnings, disability, lack of family support and challenges in accessing public benefits (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2016).

In 1995, during the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, the eradication of the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women was identified as an area that requires special attention and action by the international community, governments, and civil society (UN Women, 1995). While the issue had been recognized almost half a century ago, the inequalities had not been sought yet.

Literature Review

Women and Poverty

The notion that women have disproportionately been affected by poverty and are more likely to fall into the poverty cycle has been commonly accepted and studied since the late 1970s. Practitioners and scholars have until recently mainly used the term ‘feminization of poverty’ to describe this phenomenon. Carolina Johannson Wannerholm described the use of the concept in a study “*The Feminization of Poverty*” (2002). C. Johannson Wannerholm provides an insight into how the term is being understood and used by scholars and practitioners and accepts Cagatay’s ample formulation that the ‘feminization of poverty’ has meant three distinct things: that women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty; that women’s poverty is more severe than men’s; and that the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to that of men. The conceptualization of the ‘feminization of poverty’ has been colored by the general development debate and feminists’ interests, which was both the source for acceptance and critique (Wannerholm, 2002). Although the term is less in use nowadays, historically it is significant since it brought attention to the phenomenon of the unfavorable economic and social position of women in society.

“*Theories of International Relations*” (Burchill et al., 2001) edition, among others, provides a feminist view of international politics and economic relations. In the Chapter on Feminism, Jacqui True elaborates on how social and economic polarization has been intensified by economic globalization by pointing out that the globalization process has increased worldwide inequality between men and women, with disproportionate numbers of women in poverty due to Third World debt crises, structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the South and state restructuring in the North. True argues that feminist scholars document that economic insecurity of an international division of labor devalues work

¹ Agency for Statistics of BiH (ASBiH), 2023: 36.7percent of women and 63.3percent of men in employment

associated with women and locates females in the poorest-paid and least secure sectors of the labor force.

In the UNDP's Working Paper *"Gender and Poverty"* (1998) Nilufer Catagay writes that gender inequalities in economic life become a causal factor in the chronic poverty of all household members also causing intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Patriarchal norms and gender gaps in wages contribute to difficulties of escaping poverty intergenerationally through vicious cycles between poverty and gender inequalities (Catagay, Nilufer, 1998).

The attention in the literature was given to the disproportionate incidence of poverty among female-headed households. In the volume *"Gender, Economic Growth, and Poverty"* (1994) edited by Heyzer and Sen the discussion centers around this issue. Disparities in the wage gap regarding earnings between men and women over many generations have also been cited as contributing to aging women's relative financial insecurity (Hollis-Sawyer & Dykema-Engblade, 2016).

Racial and ethnic aspects of women's poverty have been examined in the working paper *"Race, ethnicity and gender poverty gap"* (Elmelech & Lu, 2004). The study assesses the importance of gender-specific demographic and socioeconomic composition in shaping differences in men's and women's poverty rates both within and across racial/ethnic lines by examining the gender-poverty gap among eight racial/ethnic groups in the US. Starting from the assumption that minority women experience a double disadvantage owing to being both women and members of a minority group, the analysis reveals that sociodemographic characteristics have a distinct effect on the poverty rate of these women and that the form and the magnitude of the effect vary across racial/ethnic lines.

Social Norms and Gender Roles

Social norms have been studied since ancient times and are recognized as part of collective human behavior. Thomas Schelling's hypotheses that explain regularities in human action in *"The Game Theory"* (1968) provided an impetus for researchers to look more closely into social norms and their influence on harmful social practices. The recognition that social norms perpetuate behaviors of members of a community or a society and are generating practices that could be harmful or beneficial has been explored in the report *"What are Social Norms? How are They Measured?"* (Mackie et al., 2015). The most prevalent social norms are those

related to gender roles. It is common for all societies to 'assign' different roles to men and women and varying degrees these norms perpetuate practices that are harmful and lead to discriminatory behavior towards women. This issue is getting more attention from researchers and scholars as well as development actors who are trying to understand how social norms are affecting development and how best harmful norms, behaviors, and practices could be addressed. OECD Development Center produced *"Atlas of Gender and Development, How Social Norms Affect Gender Equality in non-OECD Countries"* (2010). This publication provides a unique insight into the impact of social institutions - traditions, social norms, and cultural practices - on gender equality in 124 non-OECD countries. Another OECD report *"Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women's Empowerment"* (2021) identifies and describes 10 types of restrictive norms that urgently need to be addressed and highlights gender-equitable alternatives which support women's empowerment in practice.

The traditional gender roles have put a disproportional burden of responsibilities on women when it comes to childcare and care for other family members, and these have, to varying degrees, been incorporated into labor policies and practices worldwide. Policies aimed at promoting a more equitable division of labor, granting parental leave rights to both parents were first promoted in Scandinavian countries in the nineties. The use of paternity leave proves to be a mechanism for facilitating more active male participation in both caring for children and the performance of domestic chores, thus encouraging a paternal role model more involved in childcare but also a tool for furthering greater gender equality (Meil, 2013). The edition *"Parental Leave and Beyond"* (Moss et al., 2019) provides a perspective on parental leave policies in different countries, and examines a range of issues in depth to offer possible future perspectives.

"Gender Identity and Relative Income within Households" (2013) study examines the causes and consequences of relative income within households. The study demonstrates that there is an aversion to the notion of a wife earning more than her husband. This impacts marriage formation, wife's labor force participation, wife's income conditional on working, marriage satisfaction, likelihood of divorce, and the division of home production (Bertrand et al., 2013).

Socio-economic Position of Women in BiH

The chapters on employment and political power in the publication *"Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina"* (ASBiH, 2022) provides

gender-desegregated data on participation in the work force by sectors and representation of both genders in the decision-making positions in political, public, and private sectors, demonstrating disproportional representation in favor of men.

UN Women's publication "*Country Gender Equality Profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (2021), through the lens of country's international obligations and legislative framework, gives a comprehensive view of position of women and men in civil, political and economic participation.

A research titled "*Influence of Gendered Division of Domestic Work on Professional Career of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (2020) confirms that an uneven distribution of labor in households negatively influences the participation of women in the labor market, the earning power and the professional development and career of women in BiH. An analysis "*Women's representation in executive positions of public companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (2022) produced by non-governmental organization (NGO) Prava za sve (*eng. Rights for All*) uncovers a high disproportion in representation of men and women in decision making processes in public companies in BiH. The study concludes that decisions on appointments are being made in narrow male-dominated political circles, often in informal male only gatherings beyond working hours.

The position of minority Roma women and men had been examined in the research "*Discrimination of Roma in Tuzla Canton*" (Musli, 2017), confirming existence of discrimination in the labor market, particularly when it comes to Roma women.

Methodology

This research examines the position of women in BiH with regard to their participation in the labor market, average income differences between men and women and causes that affect their situation with a focus on social norms and perceived gender roles, hence identifying whether the harmful practices perpetuated by social norms contribute to increasing inequality between men and women and widening gender gap in poverty. The research provides a closer look into employment practices and the participation of women in the labor market in BiH. The research further explores the participation of women in managing positions both in the public and private sectors and how women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions influences working conditions and the quality of family-oriented social services. Multidimensional aspects of poverty are being examined, particularly when it comes to marginalized women who are less

likely to access jobs, education, and public services.

The main hypothesis of the research is that (1) women are more likely to lose income or fall into poverty due to the perceived gender roles in society that are negatively affecting women's position in the BiH labor market, which is ensured by a set of subhypotheses:

- 1.1. Women in BiH are less likely to be employed or actively participate in the labor market because of the perception that they will be more likely to be absent from work, and thus less committed to their careers and work obligations, due to childcare or care for family members.
- 1.2. Employed women in BiH are performing less-paid jobs and thus are more vulnerable to falling into poverty.
- 1.3. Women are underrepresented in managerial and decision-making positions and thus less effective in creating an enabling working environment for women.
- 1.4. Marginalized women in BiH are more likely to fall into poverty due to prejudice, stereotype, and gender discrimination.

The research methods include desk research, semi-structured interviews, and a survey. All methods used are complementary. The desk research examines the official statistics on employment, the workforce in the market and those outside the labor market as well as relevant reports published by BiH government agencies, international organizations, and international and local non-governmental organizations. The relevant academic work has been considered. The targeted interviewees include representatives of relevant governmental agencies, a member of the academic community that has produced a relevant body of work in studying social norms, and representatives of relevant non-governmental and international organizations.

The online survey administered in 2023 gathered data and insights about perceived gender roles in BiH society. The survey has been conducted among the general population targeting people of all genders, various age groups, education levels and employment statuses throughout BiH. The survey aimed to identify prevalent social norms and perceived gender roles in society. The survey has been distributed widely, via social networks and through e-mail exchange to targeted participants and groups, collecting 312 responses from people living in municipalities of both enti-

ties (the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska) and the Brčko District of BiH. The demographic data gathered includes information on gender, age, education level, and residence. Out of the total of 312 participants from the entire country, 76 percent were women and 22.8 percent men with four participants not declaring their gender. The highest number represented the working age population, 35-44 and 45-54 years of age, respectively 25 percent and 38.1 percent. 15.4 percent were people in the age group of 55-64. 7.7 percent were within the age group of 15-24 and 3.2 percent were above 65 years of age. 45.2 percent of surveyed participants have university degree or higher education, 24 percent has a master's degree, 6.4 percent PhDs while 23.1 have secondary level education, while 1.3 percent finished primary level school. 67.9 percent of participants are employed or self-employed (10.9 percent) while 3.2 percent is working seasonal or temporarily jobs. Most survey participants come from urban areas, 85.6 percent.

Results and Discussion

H1.1 Women in BiH are less likely to be employed or actively participate in the labor market because of the perception that they will be more likely to be absent from work due to childcare or care for family members.

1.1.1. Labor Market Participation

Women's economic participation is one of the four distinct dimensions that is being assessed globally to determine gender parity or level of gender equality achieved in societies around the world. The Global Gender Gap Index is used to assess the current state and evolution of the status of economic participation and opportunity, education attainment, health and survival and political participation. According to "Global Gender Gap Report" (World Economic Forum, 2023), gender gap index in BiH is 69.8 percent. The World Economic Forum's report predicts that it will take another 131 years to achieve full gender parity that currently stands at 68.4 percent globally. Economic participation and opportunity sub-index, while steadily increasing, is still at only 60.1 percent both globally and for BiH.

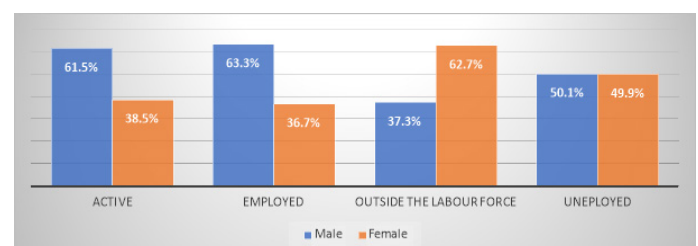
It is relevant to analyze not just employment status of men and women in BiH, but also a rate of active working age population and those outside the labor market force, meaning those that are of working age and not seeking employment.

According to Agency of Statistics' labor market survey for the last quarter of 2022, out of the total active population 842 thousand are men,

while 566 thousand are women. 744 thousand of men in BiH are employed comparing to 430 thousand of women. 951 thousand of active women are outside the labor force while 566 thousand of active men are in the same situation. While number of men and women seeking employment is equal, 98 thousand per each group, the percentage of active working age women seeking employment is higher due to the lower employment rate of women active in the labor market.

Figure 1.

Working age population by status and activity in BiH, Q4 2022 (%)



The unemployment rate for the fourth quarter of 2022 was 14.3 percent. Unemployment among active working age male population was 11.6 percent comparing to 18.6 percent for active working age female population.

The concerning notion is that there is almost 1.5 million people outside the labor force, majority being women, 951 thousand. Hence, out of 1,517 thousand working age women, 1,087 thousand or 71.66 percent are not employed. Being unemployed deprives them of a steady income, which makes them dependent and limits their choices. Statistics also show that most people, of all genders, that find themselves outside the labor force are those with primary school education (47.7 percent) and secondary level education (46.1 percent) (ASBIH, 2022).

The long-term unemployment is also prevalent among women. 53 percent of women actively seeking employment have been unemployed for four years or longer, while 39.8 percent of men experience long-term unemployment (ASBIH, 2022).

1.1.2 Perception of gender roles

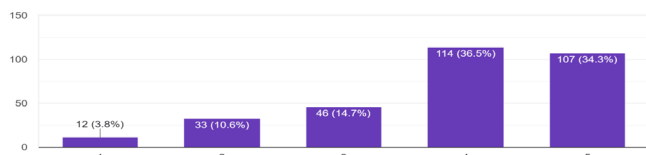
The survey data on perception an attitudes of roles society 'assigns' to men and women when it comes to childcare and care for elderly or incapacitated family members, uncover possible reasons while women are less active in the labor market or why unemployment rate among women is higher. Majority of the surveyed agree (36.5 percent) or strongly agree (34.3 percent) that childcare and care for the elderly or family members that need

care is primarily a role assigned to or undertaken by women.

Figure 2.

Childcare and care for the elderly or family members that need care is primarily a role assigned to women

6. Briga o djece i briga o starim nemoćnim članovima porodice je uloga koju u našem društvu primarno obavljaju žene.
312 responses

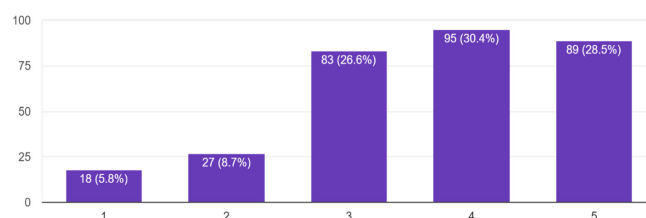


Likewise, 32.4 percent agree and 16.3 percent strongly agree that men are perceived weak if they perform domestic chores or take care of children. BiH, thus, falls in the pattern of developing countries where gender role expectations are determined by traditional beliefs as well as social, cultural and political norms. Caring for children, sick, elderly and disabled, in addition to household chores are assigned to women (Dormekpor, 2015). Re-affirmation of patriarchal traditional norms after the 1992-1995 war, and decades after, have relegated women in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the private sphere expecting them to accept nurturing roles, the role of mother and educator (Spahic-Siljak, 2007). This affects women's activity in the labor market and explains a high rate of women outside the workforce. This is reinforced by the results of the "Research on the influence of the gender division of family and household chores on the professional life of employed women in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (2020), which provides evidence that in 93.8 percent of relationships, all or most of the routine household chores are performed exclusively by women, and in most relationships (80.8 percent) a woman does all or most of the work related to childcare.

Similar line of thinking is shared by the surveyed participants when it comes to perception on reasons why employers are more likely to engage men than women even though both have same or similar qualifications. 30.4 percent and 28.5 percent of survey participants respectively agree or strongly agree that employers will be keener to engage a man rather than a woman in case they have the same or similar qualifications.

Figure 3.

Employers are more likely to engage men than women when candidates have the same or similar qualifications



The prevailing perception that the main reason behind this practice is the employer's notion that a woman will at some point use the parental leave (51.3 percent) or that she will be more absent from work to take care of children or other family members (59.9 percent).

The discouraging practice of favoring male over female candidates further perpetuates harmful behaviors and, despite having the same level of skills, women find themselves in disadvantaged position to gain and keep employment. Employers are less likely to invest in the developing female candidate and employees perceiving them less committed to their careers (Harvey & Tremblay, 2019). High rate of long-term unemployment among women could be put in relation with this practice. The lack of previous employment record and references makes the job search more tenuous and leads to longer term unemployment, leaving women financially dependent on their partners and families.

These perceptions are transposed to how society views the gender roles in relation to taking the parental leave, which despite the fact that it is legally possible for both parents to use it, is almost exclusively being used by women. The prevailing majority of surveyed believe that society would not be benevolent to men who decide to use the legal right of taking or sharing parental leave with their female partners. The large majority either agrees (35.6 percent) or strongly agrees (23.4 percent) that it is considered unacceptable in the society for a man to use parental leave.

This puts additional burden on women to conform to social norms and put their careers on hold. They are also often subjected to interrogation about their intentions to become parents, risking to be forced to choose between employment and parenthood.

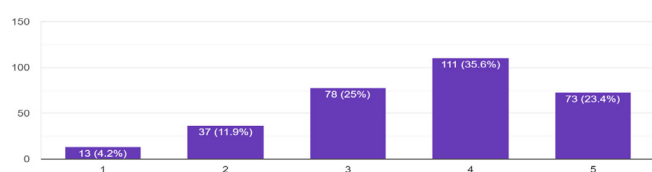
The recorded data show that only 0.36 percent of men in BiH have exercised legal right to

compensation instead of salary, indicating the use of parental leave by these men (SOC, 2022). The survey data reveal that even in the cases when a man takes a parental leave it is due to the reason that a woman is not able to use it (19.5 percent), a man is as single parent (5.7 percent), or it is economically beneficial for the family due to the greater earning power of the female partner (45.9 percent).

Figure 4.

It is considered unacceptable in our society for a man to take parental leave

14. U društvu se smatra neprihvatljivim da muškarac koristi porodijski dopust.
312 responses



The parental leave becomes key to the paradigm shift that childcare related absence from work affects only women. In addition to serving the families' welfare, involvement of men in post-natal and childcare in general impacts the perception of the workplace regarding female employees and gender pay gap (Harvey & Tremblay, 2019). The government policies related to not only parental leave, but also those aimed at improving the support services for working parents, paired with the discourse that influences social norm change, would also relieve employers of the notion that they would lose a female employee for a longer period of time due to parental leave. Sharing parental leave time among partners is, thus, beneficial for families, employers and the economy.

In terms of support services that are available in their communities, the survey participants believe that there is an adequate number of day care centers for children (61.3 percent), while they are not satisfied with the number or quality of facilities for elderly care (42.6 percent).

Correlations: The perception that society expects from women to assume most duties when it comes to childcare and care for other family members is prevalent among younger (15 -24) and elderly male population (65+), respectively scoring 4.6 and 4 on the scale. Perception that the employers will rather employ a man than a woman even though they have same or similar qualifications is predominant among women (3.83). When it comes to satisfaction with a number of childcare facilities, the incidence is lowest among population that are most likely to have children, people above 45 years

of age (scoring between 3.00 – 3.52). The correlations indicate that traditional norms prevail among young people, which calls for engagement and awareness arising with this population group.

Traditional norms are more exhibited in less developed economies and hierarchical societies where group goals precede the individualistic aspirations (Dormekpor, 2015) and group norms are then effortlessly imposed on individuals who share certain group identities.

The views shared by experts and representatives of governmental agencies and civil society groups reinforce the thesis that perceived gender roles are relevant in the labor market.

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić, Director of Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AGEBiH) attributes insufficient activity of women in the labor market to the social norms and equally to lack of care economy or lack of services that would enable women to participate more actively in public and economic spheres of life. She emphasizes that *although BiH has the most progressive labor legislation in the region, it is still lagging behind other countries because of the lack of services for child and elderly care and the norms that hinder the women's economic participation. Women in BiH are academically more successful than men, however they are perceived as an "expensive work force" due to the notion that they will be more absent for parental leave and childcare. The government also does not provide any incentives or subsidies to employers to mitigate the risks or lessen the burden.*

Aida Mehdić, a researcher and a coordinator in Roma women network in BiH confirms that her findings and experience correspond to the prevalent opinion. She stipulates that *dominant social norms are mostly well known, stereotypical, as well as gender roles. The phenomena are very much affected by the position women socio - economic position, especially if a woman is belonging to a marginalized societal group. Social norms and gender roles generally require that women predominantly take over all responsibilities and tasks concerning households and childcare. She attributes this to tradition saying that such norms have been nurtured and practiced for generations, thus it is rooted in our collective subconscious. Often, the women themselves feel a kind of guilt and the need to thank husband for taking care of their child or for doing some household chores."*

Srdan Dušanić, a social researcher and a scientist, has mainly been working with and con-

ducting research on social norms among young people. He states that in his work with young men and women, predominately high school age students, he has established a strong presence of gender stereotypes that favor the role and supremacy of the man in relation to women. *This is associated with both common and traditional social roles that exist in society and perform a subtle pressure on everyone to behave in accordance with the norm. It is a product of socialization that takes place through learning by model in the family, school and through the media.* Dušanić, however, marks a positive trend that is evident in the last decades, that came along with the emancipation of women, and thus a raw division of work is being less pronounced in recent period.

Željko Blagojević, program specialist for population and development issues at UNFPA, claims that *social norms affect both women and men. Men, however, are not aware that the quality of family life is in direct relation with the distribution of work and patriarchal norms that impose gender roles and dictate that ,women’s place is at home“.*

Dženana Aladžuz, a development professional, who works on women labor rights and economic empowerment of women gender-based violence (GBV) survivors with Infouhouse organization, is of opinion that *women do not take over household chores from men, those are simply imposed on them as binding, as ‘their responsibility’ from childhood.* She points that the impact of the gender division of household chores on the professional life of working women in BiH is enormous. *It is obvious that working women really do the “second shift” at home. All of this leaves negative consequences for the private and professional life of women, more precisely, according to the research (Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020), it leaves them five times less time for rest, for personal and professional progress and improvement, participation in social activities or politics.*

H1.2 Employed women in BiH are performing less-paid jobs and thus are more vulnerable to falling into poverty.

1.2.1 Sectors that employ women and their monetary power

To determine whether women are performing less paid jobs it is necessary to look at the statistical data indicating in which sectors women are employed and what is the average earning power of those sectors.

Figure 5. Women employment by sector; Data source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

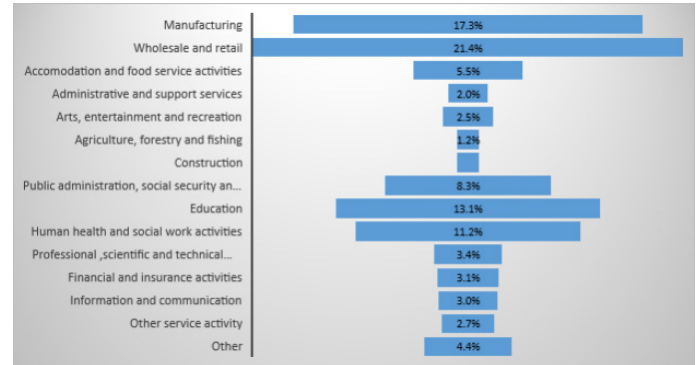


Figure 5 shows the proportion of women employed by specific sector or industry indicating that majority of employed women work in manufacturing (17.5 percent) and wholesale and retail (21.7 percent). Another significant group of sectors women occupy are education (13.1 percent), health and social welfare (11.2 percent) and public administration (8.3 percent).

Average net salary in BiH is one of the lowest in the region and far below the EU average (ILO, 2022). Average net salary in 2022 was 1.122BAM /573.67EUR /628USD (Agency for Statistics, 2023). Variation of average net earnings by sector or industry provide indication on how much women earn in average and which sectors are more lucrative.

Figure 6. Percentage of average wages by sector in comparison with the average salary, Q4 2022; Data source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

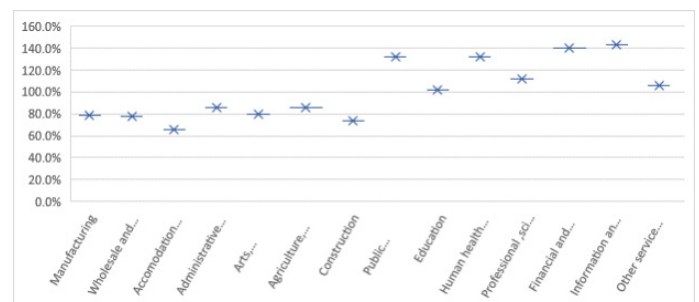


Figure 6 indicates the average salary by sector or industry in comparison with the national average. Thus, the sectors and industries in which 51 percent of women are employed pay less than an average salary. Wholesale and retail sector that engages 21.1 percent of women pays 77.6 percent of average salary, while the second largest sector that

employs women, manufacturing, pays 79.1 percent of the national average. This is exacerbated by the fact that the lowest paying is the garment industry that almost exclusively employs women, approximately 80 percent of garment workers worldwide are women (Clean Clothes Campaign via CARE International, 2021). The share of textile workers in manufacturing sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 24 percent in Federation of BiH and 23.25 percent in the Republika Srpska (Vukelić et al., 2020), while average reported net wage in 2022 was 693BAM / 354.3EUR /387USD² or 61.8 percent of the average salary (ASBiH, 2022).

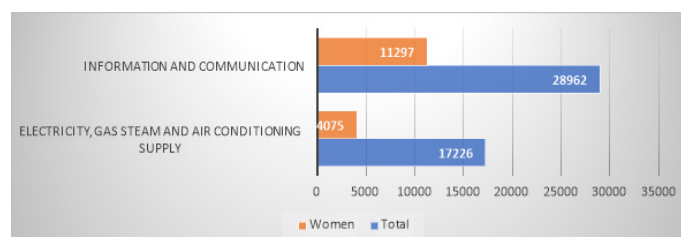
The workforce distribution according to sectors shows disproportion of female and male workforce both in the service and trade sector as well as those that are classified as professionals. 67 percent of workers in the service and trade sector are women and 65 percent of all professionals are also female. Hence, better situation for women when it comes to earning is in another group of sectors that women predominantly occupy. The salaries in education are almost corresponding to the national average (101.9 percent), while the salaries in health and social work activities, equally as the public administration, are higher than the average (131.8 percent). The participation of women in these sectors can be attributed to social norms given that health, social work and education sectors are viewed as 'more appropriate' for women and also to the fact that 33.2 percent more women than men in BiH finish university education, while percentage of master degree attainment is even higher (44.6 percent) (ASBiH, 2022).

Women in BiH are underrepresented in highest paying sectors, electricity, gas steam and air conditioning supply, and information and communication (Figure 7).

Information and communication sector that offers the highest salaries, 42.8 more than average, employs women in proportion of 39 percent, while the second highest paying sector, electricity, gas steam and air conditioning supply, where salaries are 41.6 percent higher than average employs 23.66 percent of women.

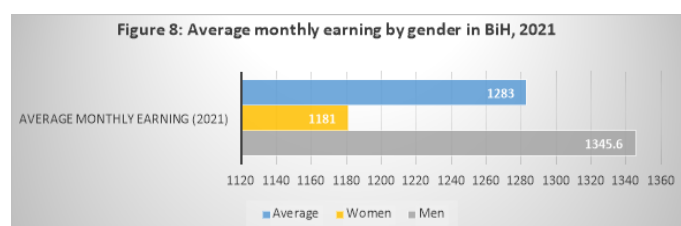
Men are in disadvantaged position when it comes to the construction industry, which pays significantly lower salaries, 26.14 percent less than average. Men occupy 89.34 percent of jobs in construction industry.

Figure 7. Women's representation in highest paying sectors, Q4 2022; Data source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in average earn 12.23 percent less than men. Woman in average earns 0.88 BAM comparing to 1 BAM a man makes (ILO, 2021).

Figure 8. Average monthly earning by gender in BiH, 2021; Data source: International Labour Organisation (ILO)



Gender pay gap³ can be attributed to social norms that prevent women to equally access the decision-making and highest paying positions or sectors. Moreover, the norms influence the selection of occupations leaving women in lower paying grades. The access to and attainment of higher-level education, however, does make the difference and despite women being predominantly engaged in 'nurturing' type of occupations, it makes possible for women to earn an average or an above average salary.

Unforeseen situations and crises affecting either the whole society or a family also have negative effects on women's career paths. The recent COVID-19 crisis has put additional burden on women in terms of taking over most of the family and childcare responsibilities, thus negatively affecting their participation in the labor market as well as the career progression (UN Women, 2022).

² Average salaries in manufacturing textiles, wearing apparel, and leather products

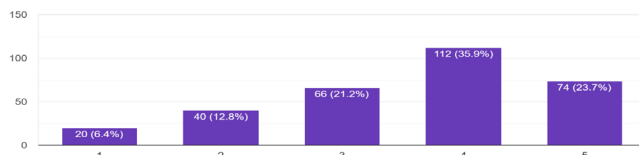
³ Gender pay gap is not equal to the gender wage gap as the pay gap also considers other sources of income and thus could be higher than the gender wage gap

1.2.2 Social norms that affect the occupation choices

Survey on social norms and perceived gender roles gives us an insight what the expectations are in terms of the responsibilities for a family's financial security. Majority of survey participants believes that society expects from men to be the primary breadwinners in their families. 35.9 percent agree, while 23.7 percent strongly agree with the statement.

Figure 9. Society expects men take the primary role of breadwinner in the family

9. Društvo od muškaraca očekuje da preuzmu primarnu ulogu kada je finansijska sigurnost porodice u pitanju.
312 responses



The survey further reveals that 32.4 percent of surveyed agree and 16.3 percent strongly agree that society views men as weak if they get themselves involved in childcare or perform domestic chores.

Correlations: In terms of perceptions of different demographic groups, certain deviations are notable when it comes to the age group 15-24. Young women (4) and young men (4.4) score highest when it comes to perception that a man is expected to be a primary breadwinner in the family.

The society's expectation for men to be primary breadwinners has negative effects both on men and women. The pattern in job and career choices of men and women is evident from the available statistical data demonstrating that most jobs available to women are in trade, service, education, and health sectors. The social expectation affecting the career choice limits young men and women to achieve their full potential and, hence, deprives the society of the potential talents and expertise. Furthermore, this expectation, paired with the believe that men are considered weak if they perform domestic chores or take care of children, creates an associated stress and anxieties affecting both men and women, and families. The aversion to the notion of a women earning more than her male partner impacts emotional relationships and quality of family life (Bertrand et al., 2013).

Srdan Dušanić notices that *the inferior position in terms of employment and earnings affects the more submissive position of women in other spheres as well because they are often unable to lead an independent life, which is why they remain in sometimes toxic relationships or are exposed to violence.*

Dženana Aladžuz highlights major challenges related to gender-based discrimination in employment. *Women continue to experience discrimination in hiring, promotion and termination of employment, as they are more likely than men to experience sexual harassment at work. Women are often exposed to direct discrimination in employment - they are adopted by non-salient questions about family planning and possible pregnancy. 46 percent of women in BiH have been exposed to some form of gender-based discrimination in the workplace (Ramić Marković, 2022).*

Željko Blagojević is of opinion that *economic empowerment of women leads to social development. If a woman does not have adequate skills to be competitive in the labor market, she is unable to secure a stable source of income and cover any other needs she has, including health and social needs and ability to make choices. In such situation, a woman becomes socially excluded, and the situation gets even worse when she reaches certain age or in cases when a woman faces certain vulnerability or marginalization.*

H1.3 Women are underrepresented in management and decision-making positions and thus less effective in creating an enabling working environment for women.

1.3.1 Women in management and decision-making positions in public and private enterprises

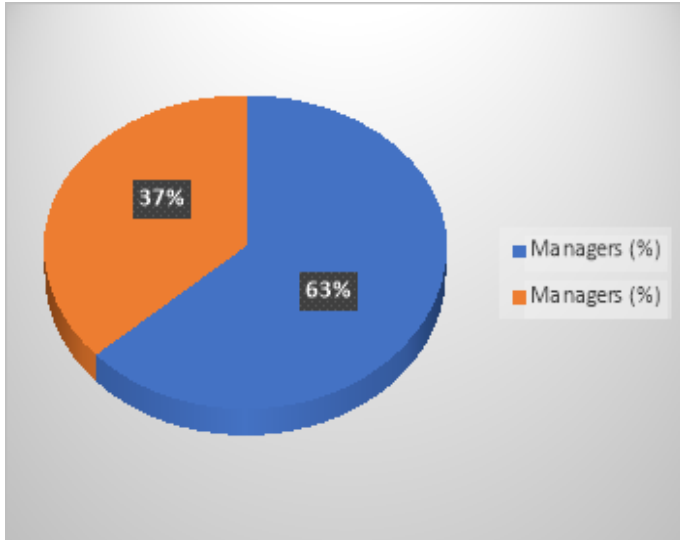
Participation of women in leadership positions globally have been slowly increasing, from 33.3 percent in 2016 to 36.9 percent in 2022. However, women have not been appointed to these positions equally across the sectors and have been hired in the leadership positions in the sectors where they have already been highly represented such as non-governmental sector (47 percent) or education (46 percent). The representation of women in leadership of energy, manufacturing and infrastructure companies is still 20 percent or lower (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Women in BiH are underrepresented in the managerial and decision-making positions. *Figure*

10 shows the proportion between male and female managers⁴ in all sectors in BiH. Out of 6.1 thousand managers, 3.9 thousand are men and 2.2 thousand are women, which makes the number of male managers 1.73 times greater than the number of female managers.

Figure 10.

Male vs. female managers in BiH, Q4 2022



Despite legal provisions that oblige legal entities owned or controlled by the state to promote equal gender representation in management, decision-making and representation, there is a great disparity when it comes to a number of decision-making functions held by men and women. At the BiH State level, none of the four directors of publicly owned companies is a woman, in FBiH women in executive positions are represented in 16.6 percent of publicly owned companies, in RS the percentage is even lower (4 percent), while in Brčko District a woman is executive director in one of the four publicly owned companies. The representation of women on the boards of publicly owned companies is slightly higher, however, it is still not meeting the requirement of a minimum of 40 percent stipulated in Gender Equality Law (GEL). In four companies owned by the State of BiH, women are represented by 26 percent. The representation of women on the boards of publicly owned companies in FBiH is 22.5 percent, in RS 15 percent and 10.5 percent in Brčko District (Prava za sve, 2022).

The structure of the Board of Directors of the ten most ranked companies on the Stock Exchange in BiH consisted of 17 percent of women and 83 percent of men. In only one company the CEO is a woman, while in the other nine companies, the

⁴ Managers are classified in accordance with the International Standards on Classification of Occupations ISCO-08 and include (11) chief executives, senior officials and legislators, (12) administrative and commercial managers, (13) production and specialised services managers, (14) hospitality, retail and other services managers

CEOs are men (ASBiH, 2022).

A positive trend when it comes to women's representation in executive positions is in the sector of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), 53 percent of MSMEs in BiH are managed by women. However, two-thirds of MSMEs are owned by men (64 percent). The other downside is that the majority of MSMEs owned by women are actually micro-enterprises, most located in the service sector (92 percent), with a lower amount of assets and less added value compared to male-owned companies. MSMEs, especially those owned by women, face serious problems to access financial services, which limits their ability to grow and develop (World Bank Group, 2018).

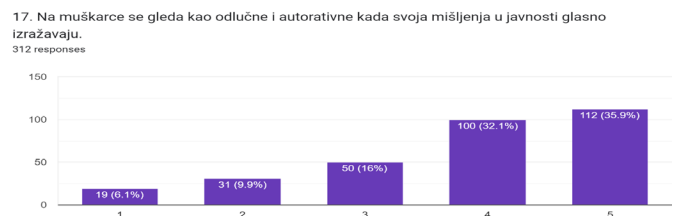
1.3.2 Social norms associated with perception of women in public life

Social norms associated with perception of women in public life that affect women's representation in executive positions should be viewed in combination with the perception of norms associated with gender roles analyzed in previous sections of this study.

The majority of surveyed participants (39.7 percent) do not believe society has a negative perception of women who participate in public or political life, while 35.6 percent neither agree nor disagree that such participation is considered inappropriate. However, Figure 11 shows that women are considered pushy by society if they state their opinions loudly. 31.1 percent agree and 22.1 percent strongly agree with the statement.

Figure 1.

Women are considered pushy if they state their opinions loudly



Men are perceived as decisive and authoritative if they state their opinions loudly. 35.9 percent strongly agree and 32.1 percent agree that this perception holds weight.

The traits of being authoritative and decisive are associated with positions of power. The perception that women are pushy and men decisive and authoritative when they express their opinions loudly pushes women in the background and makes the decision-making positions less available for women. Learned patterns and patriarchal gender roles in BiH continue to influence leadership culture with the evident dominance of the male culture of leadership (Kovačević & Spahić-Siljak, 2019).

Correlations: The prevailing opinion that society perceives men as decisive and authoritative if they state their opinions loudly is among the age group 15–24 (4.24), persons with higher education levels (3.91 – 4.15), and women living in villages (4.29).

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić highlights that women are represented in managements in sectors that are either non-profitable or generate less monetary power and they are underrepresented in positions that carry power and high pay. *The positions in management boards of publicly owned companies are almost exclusively reserved for men because those are in most cases political appointments and source of political influence and power.*

Dženana Aladžuz highlights how important is to examine the statistics when it comes to various spheres of public life, particularly appointments to positions that carry great social and monetary power. No woman is the president of the board of directors of any sports association and 96 percent of city or municipal mayors are men. The only positions of power where women are in an advantaged position is in the judiciary where women are representation is 64 percent as judges and 53 percent as public prosecutors (ASBiH, 2022). *Even two-thirds of passport holders are men!* This data indicates that when it comes to mobility and opportunities that could be seized elsewhere, women are, in the majority of cases, constrained to their place of residence.

H1.4 Marginalized women in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more likely to fall into poverty due to prejudice, stereotype, and gender discrimination.

1.4.1 Data on marginalized women's participation in the labor market

Women and girls in disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalized situation are often overlooked by mainstream policies and practices and are discriminated against in the labor market. The

marginalized women in BiH are mainly those belonging to ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, gender-based violence survivors, LGBTQI persons, displaced and stateless persons.

The status of minorities in a society that is by the Constitution governed by the majority ethnic groups affects the participation of minorities in public, political, and economic spheres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, affecting the Roma minority most severely. Minority women are, in addition to discrimination based on racial and ethnical basis, exposed to gender-based discrimination (Elmelech & Lu, 2004).

The available data on marginalized women's participation in the labor market is scarce. Evidence is available mostly for marginalized Roma women, the largest ethnic minority group in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Roma women have one of the lowest employment rates in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans region. Only 4 percent were employed in 2017 compared to 19 percent of Roma men. Of the labor 13 percent of Roma women were actively seeking a job. A gender gap also exists among Roma youth, with females being more likely not to be in employment, education, or training (NEET). NEET rates have remained high and relatively stable for young Roma women for the last decade, being 92 to 93 percent on average.

In the Tuzla Canton where the majority of Roma resides, only 3 percent of Roma women and 3.3 percent of Roma men were in formal employment in 2017. 20.35 percent of Roma men were earning income in an informal market compared to 8.45 percent of Roma women in the same position, while 9.15 percent of Roma men and 2.75 percent of Roma women had been engaged in seasonal work. The main reason for the low employment rate both among Roma men and women is due to lack of education and training as well as the prejudice and discrimination they face. Only 6.3 percent of Roma women and 7.05 percent of Roma men had finished secondary education and those with a university degree were less than 0.5 percent. Roma drop out from regular education due to poor housing conditions (57.8 percent), and the inability to buy everything needed for school (58.5 percent). In addition, other reasons also include early marriage practice severely affecting 21.3 percent of Roma girls (Musli, 2017).

The practitioners and experts also find that marginalized population groups, women in particular, suffer from greater exclusion from the labor market.

Gathering her findings and experiences mostly directly from the field Aida Mehdić states that women of poorer material status and marginalized women, i.e. Roma women, women from rural areas, independent parents (single mothers), survivors of violence, etc. are in a dire situation and find it difficult to make a breakthrough. This is visible also from observing the conditions they live in. She highlights that *it is not some kind of prejudice, but it is an impression that is mainly a product of the condition of the mentioned categories of women and their families*. Also, she has been encountering cases of women who have been denied employment because they have more children, due to the perception of employers that they would not be productive. This is especially pronounced in employment for minimum wage jobs.

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić is of the opinion that the *under-capacitated social and welfare sector contributes to mounting problems in society and this particularly comes into play when marginalized and vulnerable women, who often face multiple discrimination, are concerned. The lack of specialization and lack of capacities within social and welfare services leave issues unresolved and often leave women who are in vulnerable position without adequate support*.

Dženana Aladžuz highlights the absence of adequate support and services particularly when it comes to the right to sexual and reproductive health. *There have been no significant improvements, especially regarding pregnancy, prenatal and postnatal care, which is especially the case for women in rural areas and women belonging to ethnic minorities. Access to social protection and health care for people with disabilities remains challenging and difficult, and women and girls with disabilities face multiple discrimination because there is no understanding of their special needs*.

Željko Blagojević also reminds that *marginalized women face multiple discrimination. They lack access to proper education and skills development training. Women in rural areas, for example, work whole their lives in the informal agricultural sector. When they reach retirement age, they are not entitled to any pension, they usually live longer than men and are left without and source of income in their old age*.

Conclusion

The high-level inactivity of BiH women in the labor market, paired with the unemployment rate of 18.6 percent among those actively seeking employment, indicates that there are underlining reasons that keep women out of the workforce and leave them without their own income, thus making them vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, and gender-based violence. Unemployed and women outside the workforce make up 71.66 percent of the adult female population in BiH. This is a proportion of women that due to their status have limited access to social benefits and health services as well as a partial or non-existent retirement plan. Unemployment is highest among workers with basic qualifications and education, both women and men.

Long-term unemployment is worrisome because it decreases the chances of embarking on or restoring an active employment status. Out of those that are registered by employment bureaus, 53 percent of women is unemployed for four or more years. This leaves them without prior job references and thus uncompetitive in the labor market.

Marginalized women are least represented in the labor market due to multiple structural barriers, lack of education and support, prejudice, and norms that limit their ability to earn a steady income that would help them to improve their position in society and access services and social benefits. BiH is a country with the lowest female employment rate in the region (ILO, 2021), with only 36.7 percent of women in formal employment. Out of women that are employed, 51 percent work in industries and sectors, including mainly manufacturing and trade, which pay average salaries that are significantly below the national average. The salaries in the trade sector are 22.3 percent lower than the average while salaries in manufacturing industries on average pay 20.1 percent less. Notorious for not paying a living wage globally is the garment industry which among its employees has more than 80 percent of women. This is no different in BiH and workers engaged in textile, apparel, and leather-related production earn 61.8 percent of the average salary (ASBIH, 2022). The unadjusted gender pay gap in BiH is 12 percent (ILOSTAT, 2021). Women who find themselves in occupations that pay an average or above average salary are women with university and higher education, mainly employed in education, health, and social work sectors, occupations that are perceived as 'more appropriate' for women. The highest paying jobs in information and power supply sectors remain less attainable to women and those employ 24 to 39 percent of women.

When it comes to management positions, the number of men exceeds the number of women in such positions by almost one-third. This includes all sectors and industries. While the private sector is not obliged by any, other than internal regulations, to appoint women to executive positions, the public sector has that obligation and must, according to provisions in the Gender Equality Law (GEL), meet a 40 percent requirement to ensure participation of underrepresented sex or gender. In reality, management and supervisory boards of publicly owned companies are 'old boys' clubs' penetrated occasionally by a small percentage of women. The most discouraging fact is that these bodies are appointed by different levels of government elected by the will or vote of men and women of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the business sector, the most ranked companies that both include those with a majority private capital as well as those with a majority public capital, 83 percent of CEOs are men. Women are, as the majority, represented in executive positions in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which are underfinanced and as such limited in their ability to grow and develop. Given that there is no legal basis for gender-based discrimination in employment or appointment of women to decision-making positions, this research has attempted to identify underlining causes in social norms that perpetuate discriminatory and harmful behavior, particularly the norms associated with gender roles the society 'casts' women and men to play.

The study reveals that social norms affect the behavior of employers, decision-makers as well as men and women themselves while they position themselves in society as well as in their families. These predominantly patriarchal norms are forming the identities, while subtle pressure is performed by society for everyone or almost everyone to conform. Society imposes expectations for girls to perform household chores and play more nurturing roles from their childhood. Working women who take over also most of the household duties related to caring for children and other family members are finding themselves in a situation to practically work a "second shift" at home. Uneven distribution of unpaid household work not only limits women to gain employment and progress on their career path, in case they are working, it also affects the quality time they spent with the family and the time they have to devote to their personal growth, development, and health. On the other hand, in a struggling economy with high unemployment and false perception that there is an abundance of available qualified workers in the market, employers often pursue ex-

plorative and discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion as well as in termination of employment, failing to recognize employees as a long-term asset. Hence, there is a strong perception that employers are less keen to engage women under the impression that they would be more absent from work due to pregnancy, parental leave, and care for children or other family members. More adequate and readily available care services and equal, or even partially equal, use of parental leave by men and women could make a paradigm shift, however, it requires policy incentives and awareness related to the necessity of social norm change.

The perception that society would have a negative reaction to women that stand out and loudly expresses their opinion, hence seeming as acting independently or empowered, is also shaping attitudes and behaviors, affecting self-confidence and imposing certain auto-censorship that limits young women to seize opportunities and pursue their goals.

The legal framework and international obligations of the country aspiring to join the European Union (EU) is expected to yield progress in this area. Deconstructing social norms that perpetuate harmful practices and behaviors have to be tackled. These norms do not only harm women and put them in a disadvantaged position in the labor market. They harm families and society as a whole given that they affect the quality of family life, affect the livelihoods and leave the economy without a valuable asset.

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